Interview with Walt Rostow

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Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

WALT ROSTOW

Interviewed by: Paige E. Mulhollan

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ROSTOW: I think it might be useful if I were briefly to start with the first impressions—

Q: Let me move this microphone so that it's in front of you as you're sitting there.

ROSTOW: —the first impressions that I had of Lyndon Johnson from others, and then how I first met him, and then how we got to know one another.

The first I ever heard Lyndon Johnson described to me in ways that made a mark, as opposed to just a general impression from the newspapers, was by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. The year I cannot tell you, but it was a time, I would assume, when Senator Johnson was interested in getting more understanding from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. It's an interview worth tracking back because Arthur Schlesinger came back from Washington, where he had been invited to call on Senator Johnson, and gave a description of that interview at dinner—there must have been other people present—which was memorable. He indicated that this was the first lengthy conversation he ever had with Senator Johnson, and the substance of it was as follows: Senator Johnson had said that his interests in government were just as liberal as Schlesinger's or anyone else's; he described his aspirations for the country in terms of social legislation, race relations and so on; and proceeded to explain to Arthur, almost man by man, what the limitations were on what you

could get out of the Senate. Arthur described it as one of the most brilliant expositions of a parliamentary situation, the human situation, that he had ever heard. It revealed a deep personal understanding—and a political understanding—of the situations of each of his colleagues in the Senate, and what the possibilities were, on different issues, of getting them to vote for liberal purposes. Arthur came back full of admiration. He said it was as impressive a performance as he had ever heard. Well, it was the first insight I ever had into the depth of the human and political understanding that I saw in Johnson later. But I did want to record that that was my first

Q: In light of later events, that's interesting—

ROSTOW: It is, and it's true. I think Arthur has referred to it later, and I think that President Johnson once said something about this conversation. In any case, for an historian, it would be worth tracking back.

Q: When did you first get your personal experience—make the personal acquaintance—with President Johnson?

ROSTOW: That came later. But before I get into that, I want to say something about another impression before I met Mr. Johnson. That was a conversation which I can date for you. It was the Friday in August [1958] before President Eisenhower gave his Lebanon-Jordan speech on, I think, the following Tuesday. So if anyone wants to take the trouble—

Q: Sure.

ROSTOW: I was in Washington to work on that speech. C. D. Jackson and I were brought in. A more unlikely pair to work on a speech on the Middle East I can hardly think of, except I had some ideas, and I generally used to get called down when there was trouble.

I had breakfast, at his request, with John Kennedy that morning. He knew I was in town and did not want to question me about the Middle East. He wanted to talk to me about

some other matters. We talked about the missile gap. I had breakfast out in Georgetown with him. It was a lovely sunny morning, and we ate very early. He drove me to work. He had a convertible, and that led him to start off with some joking remarks about the other candidates for the nomination of the Democratic party. He said that seeing he was so young there were some who thought it inappropriate for him to compound this image by driving around in a convertible with the top down, but he liked to do it. In any case, he understood that some of the other candidates rode around in convertibles.

But then he suddenly said to me, quite soberly, driving to the old State Department Building—he said to me, “You may wish to know why I think I've got a right to go for the nomination.” Then he went through the other candidates. He thought well of Hubert Humphrey, but he thought he could be as good a president as Hubert. He thought that Adlai Stevenson had had two chances, which is about as much as a party owed a leader. He like Stu [Stuart] Symington, but he thought he was lazy, and didn't think that his judgment necessarily was any better than his own. And then he came to Lyndon Johnson. He said, “The man who has the most legitimate claim on the party for the nomination was Johnson. He has the qualities of a president, but I do not believe a man with his accent from that part of the country can be nominated, and therefore I feel free to make a try.”

Q: Did that give you an intimation that perhaps—at least you didn't end up being surprised then in 1960.

ROSTOW: You're right. I was one of the few people who was not the slightest bit surprised. I had heard him make other remarks later about Johnson as being a man fully qualified and whose vision of the country—what he wanted to do for the country—was good. And I knew a little about his relations with Johnson on certain things he was [trying] to put through the Senate.

Q: Certain things Kennedy was trying to—

ROSTOW: Certain things Kennedy was trying to put through, yes. It was obvious that they worked closely together. Senator Johnson was helpful in an enterprise in which I was involved, of trying to get a resolution through the Senate that would set up the India-Pak [Pakistan] consortium, for example.

It was only later that I've heard from President Johnson the story of Senator Kennedy's role in the 1957 civil rights legislation. I did not know about that at the time. But, in any case, that was the second impression. I was not the least bit surprised, and to this day I assume the primary reason he asked Senator Johnson to be his vice presidential candidate was because he thought that if he died this was the man he thought would be the best president for the country.

Q: Rather than a political choice to carry Texas?

ROSTOW: I think that probably also played a part and a converging part. But President Kennedy always—mortality, he was not a dour man, he was a gay man—but the possibility of death was something real to him. He had almost died a few times. I can't weigh his net judgment, and obviously carrying Texas was an important piece of business if you were going to try to win. But I think deeply rooted in John Kennedy was this judgment about Lyndon Johnson. I would add, as we now come into the time when I met then-Vice President Johnson—I never really shook his hand until he was vice president. (Interruption)

But there's a continuity in this. I met Vice President Johnson and observed his relations with President Kennedy—I should add that the range of my observations was limited to national security affairs in 1961, mainly. But in that field I had a chance for intensive observation. The impression I had of Kennedy's respect for Lyndon Johnson's judgment continued.

More than that, Kennedy knew how far from Eisenhower Nixon really was as vice president. Nixon was kept extremely distant from current business. When I was in Washington to work on the Lebanon-Jordan speech, Jackson and I went around that same Friday morning to talk to Vice President Nixon in the Senate to try to get his support for a line we were going to try to press with [John] Foster Dulles and President Eisenhower. Nixon said that this was the first time a serious question had been addressed to him in many years.

Q: That was rather late in his vice presidency, too.

ROSTOW: He said that the White House gang kept him away, although Milton Eisenhower kept some sort of contact. He was clearly grateful that we'd come to him for his judgment and his help. He said he couldn't give us much help, although he approved the line we were outlining in the speech.

Well, I think President Kennedy had an inkling of this. In any case, he systematically made sure that the Vice President was at all the key meetings. I remember there was once an important matter. I don't recall the substance of it. We met; he asked where the Vice President was. The Vice President was circling Washington, trying to land in a plane in bad weather. He said, “We'll put that issue aside, and we'll meet later this afternoon when the Vice President is here.” He made sure that the Vice President was close to national security issues, and up to date. I have the impressions, although I can't vouch for it, that they saw a good deal of one another bilaterally in 1961, quite aside from the Vice President's presence at the meetings. He would solicit the Vice President's view, and I suspect solicited it not only in large meetings but privately, in national security matters.

Q: Did his staff cooperate in that? You mentioned Nixon saying that the White House gang kept him away. Was there any—?

ROSTOW: In 1961 I saw no evidence that the White House staff interfered in that relationship, and that will say something else about President Kennedy. He had total control of his staff. He was thoroughly capable, if he wanted a certain relationship with a man, of arranging it.

Q: I see.

ROSTOW: He used his staff in an extraordinarily subtle way. He had a judgment about what each man was good for, and he would use him for what he judged he was good for. On the other hand, he kept good bilateral ties to members of his staff so there was little uneasiness that they were not seeing the President. He would, like any strong president —like President Johnson, too—make sure he got the advice he wanted from the men he wanted. He had a firm assessment of what the strength and weaknesses were of those that worked for him. So I doubt very much that anyone could seriously interfere with a relationship that President Kennedy wanted to keep. Now, beyond 1961 I was in the State Department, and really can't vouch for it.

I should add one more impression I had of Vice President Johnson. It was when I was asked to chair one session of a meeting of the Advertising Council which annually gathers in Washington. All the brass came to address them. It's a tradition that they managed to get accepted. I was sent out to chair one of the sessions. At that session the Vice President spoke. He was just back from Asia, and he spoke about foreign aid. He made the best single speech on foreign aid I've ever heard by anyone. It was the first inkling I had personally of this fundamental strand that runs through his whole political life and, of course, ran through his presidency; namely, his outrage at the wastage of poverty and lack of educational facilities, lack of health facilities. He made the link between what he had seen in our own country and seen as a young man in Texas with these poor people out in Asia. And he spoke of how much could be done in the span of one man's lifetime.

Q: This was a speech that was written by his staff as opposed to the White House staff?

ROSTOW: No, it wasn't written by anyone. He spoke extemporaneously. It was the first time I had ever heard him speak extemporaneously. He just stood up and talked about his impressions, and as always when he did that, it came through vastly better than anything fabricated for him by speech writers.

Q: You did, however, write some speeches for him on foreign affairs in 1961, didn't you—the Berlin speech, for example?

ROSTOW: The Berlin speech—that, of course, was approved by the President and the Secretary of State. That was an amusing story. Mac [McGeorge] Bundy and I in that first year split the crises. I was assigned Laos and Vietnam, and he did Congo and Cuba. Then he mainly did Berlin except when it would get hot. Then both of us would put our shoulders to the wheel on Berlin, because I had a lot of European experience and background on Berlin. It was just before I went away on my first leave. He called me over. He said, “Look, I've got to write a letter to Willy Brandt from the President for the Vice President to take to Berlin. He has got to make a speech. Will you draft it?” I was leaving that afternoon. So I got a yellow pad and I just wrote out a speech. It was one of those times when, you know, there's no break in it. I knew what I wanted said and wrote it out just without a break, and we typed it up. Immediately we were called to the Mansion—to the Yellow Oval Room in the Mansion. There was the Secretary of State and I guess the Secretary of Defense. I remember Lucius Clay was there. And Mac just turned it over: “Here's the draft that Walt did.” President Kennedy read it and passed it to the Vice President and the Secretary of State. They read it, and they just nodded. That was the basic draft.

Q: That was all there was to it.

ROSTOW: That was all there was to it. It was one of the quickest turnarounds I ever saw with a speech. Now, on the plane they added a little bit, but basically it stayed. I was the guilty party in putting in the reference to “our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor.” I did it for a particular reason. I knew from my contact with the Russians—notably with “Smiling

Mike" [Mikhail] Menshikov, who was about as bad an ambassador as the Soviet Union has ever had in Washington, and a thoroughly bad actor—probably a bad reporter too. But I had known how much Soviet policy was looking at our situation in Berlin in terms of the certain knowledge that everybody else was willing to bug out—even the Germans, let alone the French and the British. All that was holding Berlin was the possibility or likelihood that the United States would hold there. Therefore, I thought that the most powerful message you could get to the Russians at this time was, in effect, to pay no attention whatsoever to the reports from Bonn and Paris and London. They were up against the United States of America. I could think of no better way of making that a political statement.

Q: And it's the one that the wire services used as a tag, too.

ROSTOW: That's right. And [Walter] Lippmann criticized it, because Lippmann has always been kind of edgy about anything on the mainland of Europe and Asia. In any case, that's the origins. But that was done, as it were, as part of the White House business of President Kennedy, not as a personal business.

Q: You didn't talk to Vice President Johnson about—?

ROSTOW: No. And I didn't talk to President Kennedy. I just sat down. We've got to get these two drafts—there's a meeting, write it; and I wrote it, and up it went, and out it went.

Q: You were just beating the plane that day.

ROSTOW: Beating two planes, because the Vice President was going to leave.

Q: What about the Vice President's trip to Vietnam that year?

ROSTOW: I had nothing to do with that.

Q: None whatsoever.

ROSTOW: Nothing to do with it. I was working on Vietnam at that time; I was assigned it very early by President Kennedy—Vietnam and Laos. I, of course, read his report and heard his report when he came back, but I didn't brief him.

Q: You had gone that year, too.

ROSTOW: I went later. I went in October with General [Maxwell] Taylor.

Q: And you all didn't talk then any time about the trips?

ROSTOW: No, we did not. I did meet Mrs. Johnson at a reception at the White House and told her that I thought the Vice President had made the best speech I had ever heard on foreign aid, which I still believe. That was most impressive. It was the first sense I had of the depth of his conviction about the outrage and the wastage of poverty and ignorance and disease.

If there is a single force and theme in his political life that is it. There are others, but that is it from beginning to end.

Q: It's frequently written by the analysts that when Vice President Johnson became President Johnson suddenly, he neither knew nor cared much about foreign policy. I take it from what you've said that you think that's inaccurate.

ROSTOW: I know it's inaccurate because I've watched him grapple with foreign policy issues from tolerably early times. It's palpable nonsense because he had been deeply involved in the Eisenhower Administration—and indeed earlier. But clearly, as the minority and majority leader of the Senate, he was in the middle of all the great foreign policy decisions in the 1950s. I had the privilege of hearing—I guess it was at Palm Desert, or it might have been that General Eisenhower came by chopper to the airport on the coast when we were out there sending some troops to Vietnam. In any case, I had the privilege of hearing President Johnson thank General Eisenhower for his support, and

heard General Eisenhower respond by saying in effect, “It's the very least I owe you. You were my strong right arm when I was president.” Then he explicitly referred to the fact that it was on Senator Johnson that he counted to bypass the disruptive stance of Bill [William] Knowland. And it was Senator Johnson who made it possible for President Eisenhower to carry forward a foreign policy of the kind in which he believed. So it's clear that he knew a great deal about foreign policy. It was in his background, and he had, in my judgment, a marvelous instinct for foreign policy.

Let's see what else before we—I saw very little of the Vice President when I was in the State Department.

Q: You went over there in December 1961?

ROSTOW: That's correct. I did go down to Puerto Rico and worked with [George] Reedy on a speech made by the Vice President at a Peace Corps conference in Puerto Rico, in which we set up a sort of international basis for the Peace Corps. I did work on that speech, and had some impact on it. I saw something of the Vice President on that occasion, but not much. I mainly worked with Reedy rather than directly with him [the Vice President], although, as I say, I can still detect in that speech some contribution. But I did try to gear that drafting to what I'd already learned about the Vice President's basic views about underdevelopment and development.

I remember having a short chat outside President Kennedy's office with Vice President Johnson just before President Kennedy was assassinated. I was in there—I guess a Friday—on an appointment with President Kennedy. I kept up, at his direction, certain continuing ties even when I was in the State Department. If I had something I wanted to talk to him about, I would get an appointment. We were both waiting—the Vice President and I—and I chatted with him about a trip my wife and I had taken to Mexico and certain of the ideas that I was pushing down there. As President Kennedy came out, he saw the Vice President and said, “I'm running late—see you tomorrow.” I did see him the next Saturday

—the next day. That may well have been the last bilateral private talk with President Kennedy that I had. I remember it was at a time when Mrs. Kennedy, who had lost a baby, was in Greece vacationing, and he was going off to Camp David with the children that Saturday morning.

My first contact with Johnson as president occurred when Mac Bundy called me up about ten days after President Kennedy was killed. There had been an article—Scotty [James] Reston was saying that the old Kennedy people were going to leave, and Mac said, “President Johnson wanted me to tell you that he hopes that you would not leave and would stay at your post.” I wrote President Johnson a letter, that's in the files, saying that I would stay so long as he wanted me to unless I felt that my contribution outside government would be greater than inside—but basically saying, “You can count on me.”

My next contact with him was when I was invited to a remarkable meeting—which I hope you dig for hard in the records and get the notes—it was in December. It was a gathering —

Q: You don't mean the first December? This would be December 1964?

ROSTOW: December 1963.

Q: Still 1963, right?

ROSTOW: The President invited me over to a meeting to discuss the outlines of his first State of the Union message. Somewhere I have some penciled notes of that meeting, but there must be better notes at that time. Walter Jenkins or someone must have kept notes of that meeting. It was well worth having notes on. There were, like geological layers, three groups of people. There were the old Kennedy people—[Theodore] Sorensen, I guess Sorensen was there—I'm sure; Mac Bundy, myself, there was the new group of [Walter] Jenkins, Bill Moyers—I guess, [Jack] Valenti and others, and then there were three old

friends, Clark Clifford, [Abe] Fortas, and Jim Rowe. And you could see those geological layers from the life of President Johnson.

He began speaking about what was on his mind, starting with foreign policy and security, and then saying the prime object was to make sure we were strong, but to move for peace. The he turned to his hopes in the domestic scene. He was expounding his views so that we would have a picture of what he wanted to convey in the State of the Union message. I remember he said, “All of you that have drafted for President Kennedy have got to remember that I speak twice as slowly so that you've got to give me shorter drafts for a given amount of time.” And then there was an excellent and, I suspect, important discussion on the domestic scene—what directions President Johnson would like to go, a discussion of the poverty program, and couldn't we find a better name for it than that; and then a discussion of education. The reason I raise it is because I remember that either Clifford or Jim Rowe, or both, made the point that President Johnson had a chance to do something that President Kennedy could not do, which was to make a breakthrough in the field of the federal role in education, because of President Kennedy's Catholicism. There was quite some time spent on that point.

But in any case, I came back and told Miss [Lois] Nivens, who was with me, and Henry Owen that my conclusion was that we had a great president. It was a most impressive exposition of what he wanted to do in military policy, in foreign policy, in domestic policy.

Q: That speech ultimately included, as I recall, some new initiatives into disarmament. Was that Mr. Johnson's own preference? Did he express that very early?

ROSTOW: Yes, he did. He said that while—I'm now talking from memory and I am, as an historian, conscious that memory can be fallible—but this is certainly a meeting of which there must be some record in Jenkins' notes or somewhere. As I recall, first, we had to keep strong, and he wanted to make sure to take stock of our strength. We needed that strength not to apply military power but as a basis for trying to move toward peace in the

world, and he mentioned the Russians. He said, “We have to put ourselves into the minds of others, including the Russians, and see if we can't move on from the Test Ban Treaty to other things.” He used the occasion of his response to Khrushchev's December 31st note to lay out an agenda with the Russians. That's an important letter. I worked in the State Department on the draft reply that we sent over to the White House, so I knew something about that letter and the President's response to it even then.

Now aside from that, let's just see how my ties unfolded. Some-time—it's in the first and it's an amusing story—before we left Washington, President Johnson had me give him a full recap on it. I think the first time he ever called me on the phone was when I was out at Aspen on vacation.

Q: Naturally not when you were not two blocks away.

ROSTOW: I don't think he knew where I was. I was in from skiing and was taking a bath, and my wife tells me that the White House is on the line, so I wrapped a towel around me, and dripping, I come out. It turned out that Elie Abel, I believe, had been on a broadcast about Rostow's Plan Six for bombing North Vietnam. And there was building up—I later tracked out where the stories came from: in a memorandum I did for Bill Moyers—first out of Saigon—then an Alsop column. This is all in a memorandum I did for the President, so there's no problem in tracking it down if anyone is interested.

In any case, the President said, “Now look, I don't know what Plan Six is, and I don't want to be pressured by anybody, and I don't want anybody leaking to the press.”

I said, “I didn't hear Elie Abel and I haven't talked to Elie Abel for a year and a half.” I told him a little about where this concept of Plan Six came from. It was a joke by President Kennedy. At the end of the Taylor-Rostow mission—it was only half a joke because he understood how ominous it was—we had raised the question in our report to President Kennedy. We said, “Here are the things we recommend, and now we have this negotiation in Geneva. But if we don't get them to stop infiltration by diplomacy, down the line may

be a very hard decision. Are we going to let them violate, through infiltration, international frontiers? Or will we have to take action against the North?" It was generally stated, but General Taylor and I agreed that was an issue coming down the line.

Q: It was not a detailed plan—?

ROSTOW: It was nothing of the kind. And I had foreshadowed that, with President Kennedy's approval, in a speech that I gave at Fort Bragg in June 1961, which was noted by the communists, because I had a Polish diplomat in my office within a few days after it was published. I said, "This is aggression," and it had an historical prediction in it: that if it isn't stopped by diplomacy, those against whom it is being conducted will be led inevitably to seek out the source of the aggression.

Q: That's the gist that has been reported widely.

ROSTOW: I said that with President Kennedy's approval. It was a kind of historical prediction I made. In any case, I had brooded a long time about this question of infiltration and guerrilla warfare. I was one of the few people who had worked seriously on the problem of guerrilla warfare in the 1950s. That's one of the reasons that President Kennedy assigned me to Laos and Vietnam. Ne knew about it.

But in any case, I assured President Johnson that I hadn't talked to anybody, and I wasn't campaigning. What happened was that President Kennedy approved certain things that we recommended and as he got up to go he said, "Well, if this doesn't work, then we may have to apply Walt's Plan Six." SEATO Plan Five was the standard plan for defending Southeast Asia. There was no other plan, but in the Pentagon this notion of hitting the North got to be known as Rostow's Plan Six. But I had not been campaigning for any point of view, outside of channels—or even inside channels—at that time, because I knew we had a negotiation in Geneva and the object, if it was successful, was to stop this infiltration through Laos.

Q: Can you date that vaguely, or within several months? When was this conversation which you're talking about?

ROSTOW: That's easy to do. [Checks with someone on the phone]

Q: The reason I'm asking is trying to get it into relation with the 1964 election.

ROSTOW: Yes. Then an interesting thing happened at Bill Moyers' thirtieth birthday party. My guess is that Bill Moyers' birthday must be around June 4. You can look it up in Who's Who.

Q: That's a pretty exact guess.

ROSTOW: There were only two of the old Kennedy group invited. There was Mac Bundy and myself. I had to leave to go to give a speech up at Haverford, so my wife stayed. President Johnson came but I was told—

Q: Go ahead. Get your voice on posterity here.

Secretary (Miss Nivens): You were in Aspen from February 29 to March 8.

Q: Early in 1964 then. That's right. Thank you, ma'am.

ROSTOW: Then at the party, two people came up to me—Valenti and somebody else—and said, “President Johnson wants you to write down your views on Vietnam.”

And I said, “Yes.” I went away. And on June 6—I guess that was Saturday—I was back. I spent the whole day writing a very long memo about my view on Vietnam. And the next day, to show what it might look like, I supplemented it with a draft of a speech that might present this view. I held that very tight but, of course, sent it over to the White House. And I gather from others that President Johnson had this circulated among others to the Joint Chiefs, because I got a call from one member of the Joint Chiefs, saying how much he

liked the memorandum. But in any case, President Johnson showed an interest in having my views presented to him, and I did.

Then at some stage along here, but that's a matter of public record; in 1964 President Johnson asked me if I would take over CIAP [Inter-American Committee on the Alliance for Progress].

Q: That's an acronym I don't know.

ROSTOW: That's the U.S. member of the Inter-American Committee—

Q: Oh, it's CIAP; yes, I do know what that is.

ROSTOW: Yes.

Q: I had never heard it pronounced, I guess.

ROSTOW: This was an engaging story. I was, again, out talking at some university in Ohio and flying back in the afternoon. When I got down to the Washington airport, there was a call from an assistant to George Ball, named Bob Anderson. Anderson said to me, “President Johnson wants you to take on this assignment because Ted Moscoso is leaving as the U.S. representative on CIAP.” CIAP had just been created.

I said, “This is supplementary to my work in the [Policy] Planning Council?”

“Yes.”

I said, “Well, I might need a little help to do both jobs.”

“You can have as much help as you want.”

“How much time have I got to make up my mind?”

He said, “Well, as a matter of fact, they're up in the Cabinet Room now with a group of Latin American ambassadors, and the President has been trying to reach you.”

I said, “I was in a plane.”

“He has told me he wants to nominate you, and I've got to call George Ball, so you've got about from where we are”—he met me at plane-side—”to the telephone down the hall.”

So I walked down the hall, and obviously I had to say yes, but by the time I got to the phone, I was delighted. I said yes, with enthusiasm. So I took this extra assignment at President Johnson's request and then, out of that I had a certain amount of direct contact with him on Latin American matters starting in 1964. It was on that, rather than anything to do with Vietnam, that I saw him.

Q: That's not very well publicized.

ROSTOW: Through 1964-1965 I had nothing whatsoever to do with the decisions made on Vietnam in 1965.

Q: Does that apply to 1964 also?

ROSTOW: Yes.

Q: Tonkin and—?

ROSTOW: On Tonkin Gulf, the only thing that I did was to drop over that night to the White House—they obviously were thinking about responding, and we had a crisis—to see if I could be helpful to Mac and see what the situation was. And Mac said, “The President has got to make a speech in Syracuse tomorrow, explaining this, and I'm all tied up. Can you help?” I'll tell you exactly who the speech writer was: Busby. Q: Horace Busby?

ROSTOW: “Horace is working on the speech, and he needs help, and he's tired. We're all tired.”

I said, “You know, I attached a speech to the memo I did on June 6. Do you have that in your files?”

“Yes, I think I can find it.” So they dug out this speech that was attached to my memo of June 6 the President had requested. You'll find chunks of that used in Syracuse. If you'll look at the Syracuse speech, you'll find it's really very well formed and has reference to diplomatic documents. We had to modify it a little, but essentially the President was, under particular circumstances, producing a rationale for hitting the North.

Q: Carefully prepared at a time when there wasn't a crisis to prepare it for.

That's right. That, I guess, is the only connection I had with anything in Vietnam—in the White House. I was following it in State, but you couldn't follow it at that stage very closely in terms of policy unless you were working with the President. This was obviously his account. I did keep in touch on Vietnam. I'd see Max Taylor when he was back, and followed it. I was terribly troubled about the disintegration taking place there militarily and politically, which I could follow from the intelligence and from discussions with Max Taylor and others who were going back and forth.

Next. I was sent by President Johnson [to Latin America] at the request of three assistant secretaries for Latin America—Tom Mann, Linc Gordon and Jack Vaughn.

It was at a cocktail party at Honolulu that President Johnson came up and quietly said —you see, Mac Bundy had already resigned, and there was quite a lot of talk about a successor—that, “Lady Bird and I had been talking about it, and we'd like you to come over and take that job.” That was early in February. It was a long ambiguous period to April, and I heard no more from him. Oh, I did hear once more when we had dinner at the

McNamara's close to April 1. But I held it to myself. I didn't know whether it was on, but he was extremely clear there at Honolulu.

Q: There was a month there then after Bundy left before you came?

ROSTOW: That's right. I was by no means clear in that time that President Johnson had decided actually to pursue the matter. I just sat tight and did my work. It was, I gather, a very difficult, complicated decision for President Johnson. He said subsequently that Bill Moyers very much wanted the job; that his first choice was Clark Clifford and Clark didn't want it. He wanted to be secretary of state. Jack Valenti was my great advocate. It was obviously hard for President Johnson in relationship to Bill Moyers.

He wasn't clear really, I suspect, as to how I would work in an operational environment. The cliche about me in Washington was that I was a long-winded idea man. I don't know whether I'm long-winded or not, and I don't know whether I was an idea man, although I tried to start some new ideas. But, in fact, I had worked a good deal of my life in tightly structured operational meetings, starting with the war when I was secretary to a British-American committee that ran the bomber offensive. I knew what it was to work tersely and professionally and precisely. But these cliches in Washington are pretty powerful. So I think even when he took me on, he didn't know how it would work.

Q: Did he give you an idea at that time that he wanted you to organize a shop that was different from the Bundy one? That's about the time there had been a lot of talk about the "little White House" and the "little State Department."

ROSTOW: That's correct. And there was of course some ambiguity in the announcement of my appointment. He changed the title. But he was totally lucid with me.

Q: Left Francis Bator a deputy to something that didn't exist anymore, as I recall—is that right?

ROSTOW: Yes, but Francis was a different story. Francis had a deal with Mac Bundy that he would be made a deputy. He came and asked me if I would honor that deal. And I thought about it. I thought if Mac had made the deal, I would honor it. I did. I don't think that shop runs well with a deputy—even though I was the first deputy, in a way. I think Mac and I got on well. We know one another well, and he did have a deputy as my—he had Carl Kaysen as my successor. But my own view of that shop is it works best if the group of senior substantive people are in fact the deputies for special areas. That's my own, by no means unquestionable, conclusion

But Francis had this commitment from Mac, and I honored it. He wasn't the general deputy, however. He was actually the man for Europe and balance of payments, and his work was no different from that, let's say, of William Bowdler on Latin America, or the other people.

Q: I didn't mean to divert you from—

ROSTOW: That's all right. We can come back to that.

President Johnson, as soon as I was aboard, gave me the most clear instruction a man could have. He said, “One, I want you to take over this shop that Mac has left; I want you to stop the leaking, I want you to build it so that you leave a better group of men-abler group of men-than those you find. But, in addition, I want you to generate a series of initiatives in every part of the world. Despite the burdens of Vietnam, I want to have a total foreign policy, and I want, in addition to what Mac did, for you to be the catalyst in generating a new set of initiatives.”

Q: So the “idea man” reputation you had at least was part of the reason apparently why he was interested in—

ROSTOW: I can't reconstruct exactly how he finally decided to gamble on me. And I do think after Mac was there, and this very awkward interregnum, it was a real step in the

dark to bring me into that family. From that moment, knowing the problems he had with that post, I would have done the very best I could anyway. But there were special reasons for trying to make it work for him the way he wanted, because I knew it was not an easy choice for him.

Q: Right.

ROSTOW: Now you should know—we won't go into it—but some time along this way when I was in the Planning Council, he started, via Valenti, asking me to file memoranda directly with him on foreign policy. And there's quite a thick file.

Q: While you were still chairman of Policy Planning Council?

ROSTOW: That's correct. This goes beyond the Latin America work. So I had a file. It's quite a thick file of memoranda I wrote for President Johnson. Whenever the spirit moved me, or sometimes I got a call saying he wants two ideas by this afternoon. I remember one time I think I got three. But I think he was testing me. And on Honolulu, for example, on the way back he asked me to draft a speech—I guess we landed in San Francisco-and Bill Moyers was tired on that trip and pretty exhausted. I wrote on the plane the President's speech for San Francisco summarizing the Honolulu meeting. He tried me out at that time. He said, “Now, I've got to write to [Harold?] Wilson about this. You do a draft to Wilson.” He was trying to see how I operated in the context in which he was thinking about using me. So there is a flow of matters beyond Latin America in, I would guess, the second half of 1965. The files would show when that relationship began.

Q: Did he give you any explicit instructions regarding what your relationship to the State Department should be?

ROSTOW: When I came aboard?

Q: When you came aboard, yes.

ROSTOW: Oh, yes, that was worked out very clearly. There were essentially two rules that we laid down; actually these were worked out with Secretary [Dean] Rusk, but with the President's knowledge, and I imagine they had talked about it.

One related to ideas. Secretary Rusk said, “Now, ideas are rare. If you have any ideas, you ought to throw them into the pool—make them available to the President. The President should get ideas from every-one—from his butler, if he wants to. The only request that I have of you is that if you put an idea to the President, please send me a copy so that I will be able to comment on it if the President wishes my view.” That was a rule that I scrupulously honored. In fact, I put few ideas directly to the President. I much more often would toss them back over my shoulder into the Department, or talk about them with Secretary Rusk. But some I would send to the President, but I never violated that understanding with Secretary Rusk.

The beginnings of my relationship to Secretary Rusk—in the early Kennedy period—were awkward because President Kennedy wanted me to be head of the Planning Council, and Secretary Rusk wanted someone else. In the course of 1961, we got to know one another well. He was comfortable when I came over to State. Then we worked more than four years together, and were much closer than people thought. The general view was that Secretary Rusk didn't pay any attention to the Policy Planning Council. In fact, I saw a great deal of him at his request. If I didn't come around, he'd call me on Saturdays. I was anxious, knowing his burdens, not to press him, not to take too much of his time. In 1966 we were fortunate in having a man move from State to that job.

Q: That's an experience that Bundy had not had with Rusk.

ROSTOW: That is correct—and which I hadn't had with Rusk when I first went, and that Henry Kissinger didn't have either; it's one of his problems. But the State Department knew me, by that time, pretty well. I had been a good working member of the Department so that was the first rule and that was easy.

The second rule was laid down by Secretary Rusk. It arose out of the interregnum. In the interregnum there was some ambiguity as to who was minding the store. [Robert] Komer, Bator, and so on, and Brom [Bromley] Smith. The State Department and other branches of the government began to send memos and foreign policy around through Moyers or Valenti or [Harry] McPherson or somebody. And there was a splaying out of authority in the White House which made the town hard to run in an orderly way. That's the first instinct of the town, to try to play the White House staff off against one another. So the rule was laid down at State and in the White House that nothing was to come to the President on foreign policy except through my shop. Those were the two rules.

Q: Fairly clear.

ROSTOW: Aside from that, at the very first session on the first morning I came over, which I guess was April I or March 31, I forget—but I came over early to work and then called a staff meeting. They hadn't been meeting as a staff lately. I laid out my view.

Q: They had or had not?

ROSTOW: Had not been. They'd been in rather a disheveled state, as you could imagine, with all this talk as to who was going to succeed Mac, and people jockeying. I just laid out my own view of the functions of the staff. I had seen it in the White House in 1961. In fact, I had a substantial hand in setting it up because I had done the analysis and made the recommendation to Kennedy that we break up the OCB [Operations Coordinating Board]. I watched it over this whole period since 1961. I also had been a consultant in the Eisenhower Administration and knew a good deal about the relationship in his time.

I said, first, we had to stop leaks. I'm not sure where there were actually all that many leaks, but the President had the impression that some members of the staff were talking to the press, engaging him in ways that he didn't want to be engaged, so, “We're going to stop that.” We were going to keep out of interdepartmental coordination. We were going

to force the town to do its business. We were going to press the State Department to work with the other departments, take the responsibility for sending us staff papers, and we didn't want any papers coming over that didn't have the stamp of the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of Treasury—and that our job was to follow the issues through the town, be knowledgeable about them, and make sure that they came over in an orderly way from State or the other departments, coordinated so that agreements and disagreements were clear; that every member of the staff was to have a clear view of what the battle had been about and what the options open to the President had been, so that the President didn't have to rely wholly on a statement of conclusions of the departments; that what we wanted, in other words, were recommendations of the responsible cabinet officers, coordinated; an analysis of how the issue had unfolded in the town, a statement of the options, and then a recommendation if the President wanted our net recommendation, but that wasn't so important. I told them I had the highest respect for the Secretary of State and the role of the Department, that we would have ample access to the President, and from now on, all memoranda going to the President would refer to Secretary Rusk, and not Rusk. They had fallen into the habit of referring to the cabinet officers that way. I just wanted to change the tone a bit.

Q: You did keep most of the staff then?

ROSTOW: Oh yes, I didn't change anybody immediately. I had a post to fill. I brought Bill [William J.] Jorden in—[Chester] Cooper was going.

Q: I'm supposed to talk to Bill Jorden tomorrow morning.

ROSTOW: Immediately he came over. I wanted to give him a chance to function in Far Eastern policy in general. He's come out of the journalism, but he was a very good Far Eastern man. The government had kept him since 1961 more on quasi-journalistic chores in government than he had wanted. I had to replace Jim [James C.] Thomson, who was going to Harvard, and I got A1 [Alfred L.] Jenkins on China. Thomson at first thought this

was a dreadfully square choice, a foreign service officer, but he had real grace. I'll never forget it about Jim Thomson. He overlapped with A1 Jenkins for some time. I told him that my judgment of Jenkins was that he was a first-class professional foreign service officer, a scholar of China, and a man of real imagination and judgment. He had heard that he was, you know—here I was replacing an imaginative academic, looking forward with, maybe, a backward-looking foreign service officer. I said I did not believe that was the case, that I respected his raising the matter with me, but then before he left he said, “I've overlapped with him now and you are right.”

Q: That takes some grace.

ROSTOW: That took some grace. I thought well of Jim Thomson for that.

Q: How was the staff organized at the time? How big was it, for example?

ROSTOW: It's about a dozen people.

Q: Just about a dozen?

ROSTOW: It was organized somewhat hierarchically. Francis Bator had a little group. He has this brilliant fellow Ed [Edward K.] Hamilton, and I guess he had Larry [Lawrence S.] Eagleburger too. He may have brought him over when I was there—Larry, I'm not sure. Then we had—I think I elevated Hal [Harold] Saunders. Oh, I had [W.] Howard Wriggins. When Howard Wriggins left to go to Columbia, I elevated Hal Saunders.

Q: That's Middle East.

ROSTOW: Middle East and South Asia—well, I switched it around. First, because Hal had worked on both Middle East and South Asia for Wriggins, but I gave him at first just the Arab world. There was plenty of trouble there, and then we had a war. But Hal just grew like a weed under responsibility. Then when Francis left, I first gave it to Ed Hamilton. He

grew like a weed, and did a great job. He'd done a lot under Francis. When he left, I got Ed [Edward R.] Fried, who is just superb.

Q: Where is he now? He's one we've had trouble locating.

ROSTOW: He had gone off into private life in some way. I've lost touch with him.

Q: We can't get his address anywhere in town.

ROSTOW: He just lives in Washington.

Q: He does live in Washington?

ROSTOW: I believe. I don't believe he has moved from Washington. I don't know what he's going to do—may have gone on vacation. He's the most related—oh, he's a marvelous man, and he's one of the real heroes of the latter part of the Johnson Administration, because he was the man on monetary affairs, and was a great linchpin in holding State and Treasury and the Federal Reserve together through these difficult monetary crises. And altogether he's a first-class economist and a most graceful bureaucrat and colleague to all his friends—never a bit of waste motion in him. And a man of great judgment as to what the right answer was. He handled Europe, too. He took over the whole former Francis Bator account, and did it gracefully and without any sort of waves or noise.

Q: These assignments you're talking about now—they were fairly explicitly made?

ROSTOW: Oh, very explicitly. I had a Latin American man. Africa I grouped with Hal Saunders. But in any case, these were assignments that—

Q: The only reason I asked was because I get the impression, at least on the domestic staff side, that the areas are kind of—

ROSTOW: Much fuzzier.

Q: Fuzzy, but on your side they're apparently—

ROSTOW: No, it was a thoroughly tight little team, and as I shook down there, and they shook down, I think we became an extremely congenial team.

Q: You'd have to be, working at that—

ROSTOW: You've got to be in that. It was small, and they all had work to do. I made some other changes. I opened up the doors between myself and Brom Smith, and used Brom Smith more than Mac Bundy did. I have enormous respect for his wisdom and experience, and Brom was scrupulous in not putting himself in any way between the substantive men and me.

Q: He was technically secretary of the National Security Council?

ROSTOW: That's right. But he was also an administrator. He managed the flow of communications, and a lot of functions which are necessary. But, in addition, he was a—on the very difficult issues, I would regard him as a confidant.

Q: He had been there an awfully long time.

ROSTOW: That's right. I just had a great respect for his knowledge of government, his judgment, his experience. I think we got on well, and I think the whole enterprise was strengthened by letting him bring more of his talents and experience to bear than was possible in his relationship with Mac Bundy.

Then I got Bob [Robert N.] Ginsburgh over to supplant the liaison man with the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff]. He had been a junior officer, and we were able to work out something which could only be done once because of the human relations involved. I could not commend this arrangement to my successor. Bob was two things. He was JCS liaison,

and he was my substantive man on military matters and Vietnam negotiations. The reason is that when he was on the Planning Council with me, I had put him to work on negotiations. He was a true expert on the ins and outs of negotiations. He separated those two parts of his life.

We had an understanding of what things he would take back to JCS and what things he wouldn't. The reason that could work was because Bus [Earle G.] Wheeler and I had a close collegial relationship. He was director of the Joint Staff of the Joint Chiefs when I came over to be planner at State. We used to meet every week, and we had known one another for many years. So I think he was comfortable with my general view of military matters. He was quite content to have me use Bob for other things as well, which would not go back necessarily to JCS. Then the other matter of great sensibility was also understood by Bob and by Bus Wheeler and by me; namely, that the whole relationship had to be conducted in a way which in no way undercut or obstructed the Secretary of Defense's relationship with the President.

Q: That's a very delicate—

ROSTOW: Very delicate. And I think neither Bob McNamara nor Clark Clifford were uneasy about this JCS liaison function. And they had no reason to be because they had their own ties to the President. I never tried to undercut the relationship and they knew it.

One thing I did help to bring about, of which I am very glad, was to get Bus Wheeler to come out to the Tuesday luncheons.

Q: The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs had not been attending prior to that?

ROSTOW: Not regularly, no. That was a tense and difficult period. I think it was a unifying, softening fact in the town. The JCS knew that their man was there in all these things.

Q: Nothing was being done without their at least knowing about it.

ROSTOW: That's right. And Bus Wheeler is an extraordinary statesman. He entered, as a member of the President's inner group, into the President's total problems on Vietnam, notably, but on other things as well. The President had the priceless asset of a chairman of the JCS who was not simply a lobbyist for some raw military point of view but a first-class military man who made sure the JCS view was presented, but who also entered with the President and the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense into all the facets of the problems facing a president—what's the wise thing to do? I think the relationship with Bus Wheeler in the time I was in the White House, and I suspect before, to the President was a model of how good it can be. I've seen it extremely bad. The 1961 relationship between President Kennedy and General [Lyman] Lemnitzer and the whole JCS position of 1961 was a nightmare.

Q: And that's not an area that you want a nightmare going on in, I'm quite sure.

ROSTOW: It was just awful.

Q: Aside from the organization of the shop, what about just the purely personal aspects of working for President Johnson? Of course there are lots of stories about his railing at his aides and one thing or the other. How was just the personal side of your relationship from, say, 1966, when you came over there, on to the end?

ROSTOW: I found it a hard thing to respond to that question in Washington in 1966 when I began to work, because the simple truth was that President Johnson was about the most considerate man I've ever worked for. President Kennedy was also extremely sensitive with his staff—sensitive to their problems and interests. And people must have thought, given all the cliches in town, that I was just being excessively loyal to my boss when I would say this. You know, people would ask me out to dinner, “What's it like, his shouting at you?” “I'm working for the most considerate man I've ever met.” You know, people thought I was lying, to put it simply. But it was gospel truth from beginning to end.

Q: Not ups and downs of—?

ROSTOW: No, I'll tell you what would happen. There were times when something would happen in which the President would explode on the phone sometimes. It wouldn't be at me. It would be at a situation, not a matter of substance. He never to my knowledge used invective on an issue of substance. He took the hard issues of policy, the realities of the world, and the realities of dealing with [J. William] Fulbright or whatever, as the inevitable raw material of his job. He would sometimes explode when there was an unnecessary leak, or some junior fellow was putting out a story that wasn't true or making trouble. And I understood this very well. If you watch the burdens of the presidency, as I have had the privilege of seeing two Presidents intimately, and watch what an incredibly burdensome affair it is for a human being to carry, behind those explosions was, “All right, there are certain inevitable problems here, but why the hell is that son of a bitch just making it that much harder for me?”

Q: And it's not the normal burdens, it's the special little burdens.

ROSTOW: Yes. Of leaks. Be clear: President Kennedy was just as sensitive to leaks. He exploded in a somewhat different way, being of a slightly younger generation and style, but just as—

Q: An explosion is an explosion.

ROSTOW: Just as much as President Johnson at leaks. And you have to see what the job of the presidency is to understand why they're so sensitive to leaks. Because the job of putting together a governmental position, or negotiating it, is so much a problem of negotiation and persuasion. What a president needs is some quiet time. In the end everything comes out, but he just needs some time to get all these things together and make up his own mind. To have that extraordinarily complex and difficult process undercut by somebody lobbying his view in the press or leaking or something—and with a foreign

government—it is extremely painful; it may break up a negotiation. I can just see—you know, the attitude of President Kennedy and President Johnson, “This is just one too many.” And most of the times that I've heard President Johnson talk, and there weren't so many—with vivid invective—weren't addressed to me, but they were addressed to situations.

Q: At issues rather than men.

ROSTOW: And if you ask me whether a president speaking to an aide, who is going to exercise discretion, doesn't have the right, even the duty, to get some of this feeling off his chest, my answer is of course he does. I didn't regard this as unseemly. I think of it as probably necessary for his survival.

And the other thing—sometimes there would be a relationship to some member of the government, a cabinet minister or sub-cabinet minister, in which he was having some difficulties, and he was able to talk to me about that problem in a direct and, if necessary, colorful way with the knowledge that a) I wasn't going to repeat it, and b) that I would find a way to convey the substance of what he wanted the fellow to do that he wasn't doing, or stop doing something that he was doing, in a way that was decorous. So a man holding the kind of job I did had to be, among other things, a channel of communication, not only if the President said, “Okay, you go with the Brazilian loan at 5 per cent.” Or make sure it went at 5 per cent, but also in conveying the President's wishes, as I say, decorously, in a way that preserved the relationships that are essential to government, but in a way that relieved the President of having to do it directly, and gave the President the chance to just tell me how he felt, and then I'd figure out how to say it.

Now, I should add another thing. The President, of course, held himself to the very highest standards that a man can hold himself to in any job, because he's president of the United States. He was just working day and night—you know, working on papers until three in the morning up there, and all the rest of it, and struggling to make the right decisions. Now,

he held us—all of us—as he should have held us, to the highest standards of which we were capable—not as high standards as those he held himself to, but high standards. I don't remember many cases in which we did something with which he was dissatisfied, but undoubtedly there were a few. But if he said, “No, I asked for it this way,” or, “I wanted this kind of data,” or, “I wanted to make sure it was checked out,” whatever it might be, this was thoroughly right and legitimate. But I can simply say that my relations to the President were, in human terms, warmer than I had any right to expect or certainly any right to demand.

Q: And this went through considerable accessibility, because you must have been in his presence perhaps as much or more than any single individual—

ROSTOW: I can't measure, but there were others—Marv Watson, and Jim Jones, and George Christian, and others, Bill Moyers in the early days. I couldn't measure it, but I did see a great deal of the President. He took me into his house as well as to his staff, into his family; took my family in as well as me. It was an open-hearted, human relationship. I came to hold the greatest possible affection for him, love for him, as well as respect for the job. I had an enormous compassion for what he was bearing through those years, for what the family was bearing.

Q: I was going to ask, this might be a good time, about your estimate of the role and influence of Mrs. Johnson. I know, for example, one trip you took with her, I believe, up to Vermont or to some place in 1967.

ROSTOW: That's right, when I gave this talk and got an honorary degree at Middlebury up there. That was just after the Six-Day War, the Arab-Israeli war. Of course, Mrs. Johnson was on the Asian trip, which was a tremendous thing. I've traveled with her a lot and spent weekends at the Ranch. I believe I know her well. I cannot assess her influence with the President. I suspect it's exercised with the greatest kind of self-restraint. But I also suspect it's very considerable. It is clear that President Johnson regards Mrs. Johnson

as one of the wisest people he knows, among other things, and I would certainly say that is the case. I found her a great lady, and a wise person, and whenever she engaged in any enterprise, it was done with the greatest professional skill and attention to detail and sensitivity. But I can't really assess the range of issues on which the President sought her advice or speculate on which she might have volunteered her judgment. I suspect that, like everything else that Mrs. Johnson has done, it was done with the highest standards of correctness.

Q: You had an outstanding opportunity, too, in all this accessibility to see Mr. Johnson in his role as a personal diplomat. You mentioned beginning with the Honolulu trip and the Asian trip and the others that you took with him. Some of the analysts have always mentioned his style and difficulties with foreign diplomats. They always talk about the misunderstanding with de Gaulle at the Kennedy funeral and this type of thing. How do you estimate him as a man-to-man personal diplomat?

ROSTOW: I know a great deal about those ties because I was present at a good many meetings, although he saw the chiefs of government and I'd encourage him to do this, to the extent that my judgment was relevant, without anybody. But I have seen him with these men, and I think the record is going to show that they found him vastly impressive as a man to deal with. I've seen him dealing with the most sensitive and fine-grained issues.

Q: Where he had to master the details?

ROSTOW: Oh yes, he was the master of the details. He knew exactly what he was saying. To understand this, you've got to understand something that I learned first with President Kennedy, and then of course with President Johnson. It's little understood. There is a fundamental difference in the dialogue between two chiefs of government and two foreign ministers. Foreign ministers are professionals engaged in certain particular technical issues of negotiation. Now, these may very well rise and go to the chief of government level. But I was startled when I first saw, with President Kennedy, the difference between

a first-class exchange between two chiefs of government and a first-class exchange between two foreign ministers. I'd seen a good deal of the latter in life, earlier, but I had not been present at chiefs of government meetings until 1961.

Fundamentally, what these men have to convey to each other is what their domestic political position is; how that relates to what they can and cannot do in foreign policy. Then, on the basis of that understanding, a) what issues can they move forward on together, and b) what ones are going to remain in contention? And then, if they're wise, how can they live with those differences without inflating them. A chief of government's job is really fundamentally different from that of a foreign minister, because he is a living politician and all foreign policy is a matter, up to 80 per cent, of domestic policy.

Q: A foreign minister doesn't have to worry about that directly, at least.

ROSTOW: He may talk about it, but he's talking about it at one remove. So that when two men get together and level with each other—and both President Kennedy and President Johnson had a gift for evoking candor from their opposite numbers because they were candid themselves—they would be talking together about the framework in which they would have to deal with these foreign policy issues, then what they could do, and what they'd have to live with as residuals.

Now, as I said, we happen to have had two presidents, President Kennedy and President Johnson, who were superb at this chiefs-of-state dialogue. And men who talked with them would go away feeling that they first of all understood the standards by which President Johnson was governing his administration—the struggle for the Great Society, for example; what he was doing, and why, in Asia or in the Middle East. All of them could perceive that he was bringing as criteria for his decision the highest standards of statesmanship—which he was. They also got from him, directly, a sense of the limitations under which he was laboring, and what it was he felt that he could do for them, and they,

if possible, should do for him. And when there was an area where they could move and he could move, then they would push that, and they would try to live with the differences.

I don't believe there was any misunderstanding with de Gaulle. I think de Gaulle understood and deeply respected President Johnson's stance toward him. For his purposes, de Gaulle had to keep this anti-Americanism alive at home and maybe in Europe. President Johnson laid down firmly a policy of never responding or exacerbating that relationship, never permitting governmental rhetoric to engage de Gaulle, partly because he thought it would only build him up, but partly also because he had a deep faith that America and France would some day come back to a more normal relationship. And in his time, he was not going to exacerbate it.

Q: I gather that President Johnson made this decision against the advice of some people in our government.

ROSTOW: There were some who were tempted to go out and argue with de Gaulle about Europe, and he laid it down that was not to be done. He laid it down very hard. Then he took the burden of de Gaulle's asking us to leave France, and NATO—just as it were, tipped his hat, but made sure the rest of the club stayed together.

Then he ended up, of course, with a gesture to de Gaulle, which de Gaulle will never forget, which was wholly his. It was in the last monetary crisis in which, at Bonn, the ministers had discussed the possibility of French devaluation and set an agreed upper limit to it—the maximum they felt you could devalue the franc and not upset the pound, and therefore set in motion a great international chain. I was rather pleased, in a note to President Johnson earlier, to say, “Don't be so sure he's going to devalue.” In any case, the old boy said, “I'm not going to devalue. I'm going to do some other things.” President Johnson had us draft a message to de Gaulle wishing him well with his tough decisions. He said to me on the phone, “You technicians don't understand what the burdens are of being chief of state and government. This is a very tough spot. If I can do anything to help

him at this stage, I want to do it." Then he gave me instructions to draft, and he said, "What do you think of it?"

I said, "I think it's great. I'm sorry I didn't suggest it."

He said, "Clear it with [Henry] Fowler and Rusk." And we did it. It was a subtle move. But it bears on what the relations between serious chiefs of government are.

I recall a memorable example of this in President Kennedy's time. There was a Belgrade conference in 1961 of the non-aligned. They were all meeting in a global, radical, poor man's club. And [Moussa Leo] Keita of Mali and Sukarno came to meet President Kennedy. This was the second visit of Sukarno, I believe. I had the privilege of seeing Sukarno a good deal in 1961. They came calling to present the results of the Belgrade conference. Sukarno was a big talker, and he was talking. Keita is a tall man—

Q: The other name I'm not getting clearly.

ROSTOW: Keita. He was a tribal chief, the President of Mali, a most distinguished looking man, about six feet, three inches, great robes, and handsome as could be. Sukarno was a blow-hard. He did all the talking. Keita just sat in great dignity on the couch.

President Kennedy, of course, wasn't going to leave him there, so he arranged a separate interview—had a separate interview with Keita. It was almost a classic of the kind of interview that I'm describing—that President Johnson engaged in. Keita said, "Well, when my country came into being, I had a problem. We had a piece of real estate, but it wasn't a country. And I had to get something to symbolize that we were a nation. I came over in 1960 to see President Eisenhower, and there were two things I wanted. I wanted a few DC-3 aircraft, and I wanted some jeeps with radios for my police so that we could have some government planes flying around to symbolize the fact that we were now a country, and that the police could move around with symbols of authority and maintain law and order. For some reason or other the Eisenhower Administration couldn't respond,

so I went to Czechoslovakia and we got hooked up with communist aid. But I want to tell you, don't worry about it. Africa is not going to go communist. The Russians and the communists don't have a sense of humor, and the African is a great nationalist. I want to tell you that I have this relationship, but you should not for strategic reasons regard it as serious or dangerous to you." Then he went on and talked about Angola, and he said, "I understand your NATO problem. The Azores are important to you and you're over a barrel in Portugal." He volunteered that. He said, "I can understand that, but I've got a problem. My brothers are being killed in Angola by the Portuguese. It's a very deeply felt issue by my people. It's very deeply felt by me, and so we're just going to have to live with that difference."

Q: "I may have to go home and criticize you for that."

ROSTOW: That's right. Kennedy responded in kind. A really interesting interview. And even that bum Sukarno could have passages of lucidity and interest when he explained the fragmentation of democratic politics and how he'd had to break up the democratic parties and parliament and try to put together his national coalition. But it was a sloppy affair as you know. He didn't get his country going. And when Kennedy asked him why he didn't get on with economic development, he said, "Politics comes first." But Sukarno, I think, and [Prime Minister John G.] Diefenbaker were the two low men on the totem pole in 1961.

However, this kind of extremely candid talk between chiefs of government, both Presidents excelled at.

Q: Let's break. The tape is going to turn off here.

At the beginning, using a quote from your predecessor, or one that he's alleged to have made, Bundy is supposed to have said at one time that 80 per cent of the initiatives

in modern foreign policy making come from the White House. Do you think this is an accurate description of the way it was?

ROSTOW: Yes. And this is for a reason that isn't described in any of the literature, of which I know, on the organization of the government. The big bureaucracies are laboring to carry out current policy. That is hard arduous labor. They're trying to keep their nose above water. Now, it is not impossible to get the bureaucracy to innovate. In fact my job for four years was to do that. And the way you do that from a planning council, for example, is by working with your colleagues laterally—your operational colleagues, persuading them that this is a good move and that it's operationally viable. In other words, the planner has got to be not just an inventor who comes along and says, “Why don't you try this?” He has got to say, “Now here is the idea, and couldn't you weave it in at this point in this way at this moment?” A good many things that we did on the Planning Council, when I took stock of what your batting average was, turned out to be initiatives of this kind. For example, we started the Berlin visibility program without even bothering the Secretary of State. I worked it out with Bill Tyler. I assigned Bill Jorden. He got with the Germans and we set it up to keep Berlin viable in the face of the wall. For example, in CIAP I launched several initiatives without bothering anybody. I worked on the concept of the national market and the modernizing of market arrangements. I started a whole line about inflation and the concept of a social contract that was necessary in order to contain the forces making for inflation in Latin America. I could use CIAP as a tool for modest innovation in Latin America. I could do certain things with [Henry] Cabot Lodge when he was in Vietnam, and with the people working on Vietnam in Washington to begin to make the South Vietnamese conscious that their ultimate problem would be to overcome the fragmentation of their political system, because some day they're going to have to run against a communist popular front and beat them. You can't do it with eleven candidates. I got that idea into the stream of policy without bothering the Secretary of State or the President. I knew it was right, and so on.

And there are a good many other things of that kind which you can do. For example, we started what are now the IRGs [Interdepartmental Regional Groups]. I guess they may have changed the name. I started them experimentally—

Q: Or "Singlets" I think they're sometimes known as.

ROSTOW: —by talking, first, the Assistant Secretary to Latin America into trying it, and then [G. Mennen] Williams for Africa.

But a president has a vested interest in innovation. He's about the only one in foreign policy who has got—he's working with history and his record. Also, he feels the pressure of problems that are arising that ought to be headed off. So he is out looking for new ideas, and he's about the only one in foreign policy who's on the search for new ideas. This was true even of President Eisenhower, who didn't regard himself as primarily an innovator. But he was out looking for new ideas. That's why he had his in-house innovators, C. D. Jackson and Nelson Rockefeller. That is how I was drawn into a good many of the adventures of the Eisenhower Administration.

Q: What you're saying is that this is not a failure of the bureaucracy so much as just a division of labor?

ROSTOW: Ideally, you should have more innovation being suggested by the bureaucracy. The Planning Council should be the center of this, and we did throw up a good many initiatives. But some of the major ones we finally got done by getting the President engaged in them.

Now, what happened when I came over to the White House, and in response to the President's instruction on new initiative, was this: I had developed in the Planning Council, in the period after the Cuban missile crisis, a doctrine as to where we ought to go in foreign policy and what our problems were. There's a piece of paper entitled "Reflections on Basic National Security Policy as of April 1965." This was the product of literally several

years work. It took the view that forces were at loose in the world after the Cuban missile crisis—including the loss of a good deal of fear of the Soviet Union—which made, from the American point of view and the rest of the world's point of view, regionalism the right approach. From the rest of the world's point of view they were less afraid of the Russians and they wanted, in the kind of world that was emerging, to take a larger hand in their own destiny, and they couldn't do it from a national basis if they went about their business rationally. From our point of view—there's a long passage in this paper on “Are we over extended?” I said we weren't over extended in terms of resources, weren't over extended in foreign aid. But we were over extended in the sense that our people felt that we were doing too much and the rest of the world wasn't doing enough, and there was a danger of an isolationist reaction here. Therefore, if other nations could do more for themselves on a regional basis, it made sense.

President Johnson, when I came in, was in a mood to move out in foreign policy initiatives. He had made his hard but necessary decisions in 1965 on Vietnam. He had gotten [through] most of what he was going to get from Congress, which was elected in 1964, and he knew the clock would be ticking on that. So other foreign policy initiatives were natural. I don't know exactly what his thoughts were down on the Ranch at the end of 1965 after he had had his operation, but it was a period of reflection. I know we sent to Bill Moyers a lot of papers on foreign policy initiatives at that time.

When I came in, in any case, I had a view, and it converged, I think, with President Johnson's view, and we did launch a set of quiet, but I think important initiatives as follows: first, on the trip to Mexico, which came only a couple of weeks after I arrived, we picked up [Arturo] Illia's ideas for a summit conference and then drove hard on Latin American integration. Then we had the OAU [Organization of African Unity] speech, the first speech ever given by an American president wholly devoted to Africa, and that again was regionalism. And we got Ed Korry in and reshaped our African AID programs around that concept.

Then, in the wake of the gathering of confidence in Asia after our military commitment in Vietnam, we saw the possibilities of regionalism there. In fact, the second job I started when I went to the Planning Council in 1961—the first was Berlin viability—the second was Asian regionalism. We had been working on it steadily since.

Q: The Asian Development Bank predated you in the White House a little bit, didn't it?

ROSTOW: This is true, but we'd been working on that in the State Department. I remember when there was this meeting of ECAFE and the issue arose, and Tom Mann, who was the Deputy Under Secretary—

Q: You used an acronym there that I didn't—they're not going to be able to get. What was this?

ROSTOW: The Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. We were discussing this just before the Johns Hopkins speech.

Q: The transcribers will assassinate me if I come home with some of those acronyms they can't get.

ROSTOW: I sensed that the President would have to take a big initiative in Asia, and he needed the Asian Development Bank. And Tom, due to Treasury insistence, had cooled off our negotiation at ECAFE—(Interruption)

Q: Okay, you were in the midst of the Asian Development Bank.

ROSTOW: Now, that idea came up out of the international bureaucracy—from negotiators at a working level of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. And due to some Treasury reserve, Tom Mann early in 1965 sent out a message cooling off our negotiator of ECAFE. He was unhappy. I remember saying to Tom, “President Johnson is going to need that badly.” We, because of our interest in regionalism, had been nursing it

along from the Planning Council, along with our friends in the Far Eastern division. Then came the speech, you know—the Johns Hopkins speech—and the question was what do we do to back it up? I was over at a White House meeting. We all agreed that we had the Mekong, and we had the Asian Development Bank. So we switched policies and threw our weight behind the Bank.

The question then was, what more could you do to generate the vision of a new Asia of regional cooperation. That became the central theme, of course, of the President's 1966 Asian trip. The theme was foreshadowed in a speech the President gave—I don't remember the month, it's checkable—to the [American] Alumni Council which was meeting in West Virginia somewhere. He couldn't fly down; the weather was bad. You can see the basic outline of his foreign policy and its relationship to Vietnam in that speech. Then he gave a marvelous talk in the East-West Center in Honolulu. On the plane he himself introduced an important dimension which gave the speech its quality, in my judgment. Otherwise, its main lines were much like the Alumni Council speech. He told the story of his own conversion to Hawaiian statehood and how that involved his view of race in America and, in a sense, his vision of a future of Asia. It's an important part of President Johnson's life, I think. It was the most effective passage in the speech, without question. It was one of the many examples of how he would lay his own stamp on a speech.

Q: That's a good aside right there. Was there a normal method describable of speech preparation during the time you were there?

ROSTOW: It varied a great deal. On certain speeches you'd start out, and he wouldn't like a draft, and then he'd try somebody else's first draft, and he would feel his way, and it would be a sort of multiple draft problem in which he'd gradually come down and lock on.

Q: Did you people do it primarily, or did his regular speech writers off the domestic side, like Harry McPherson, for example?

ROSTOW: It varied. I'd say more often than not they would come in to me and I would outline what I thought would be useful foreign policy material; then it would come back to us. Sometimes we would give them a draft, a State of the Union foreign policy draft. Occasionally—there was a speech out at Lancaster, Ohio, once while Bill Moyers was there—I'd draft something, and it would be used almost as drafted. I guess the West Virginia Alumni Council speech was a little like that. It varied a great deal. I would say that it was relatively rare, for major speeches, that my drafts as written, or first drafted, were the final draft—more often the themes I suggested. Sometimes on shorter things around the White House my drafting would survive from beginning to end. I happen to have no ego attachment to drafting in government. It's a great asset, because it's an awful pain, if your ego is tied up with drafts, to see what happens to them. But such as I have is tied up with a whole lot of books—(Interruption)

ROSTOW: These drafts, you were asking me about.

Q: Yes, I think you had answered pretty well what I had asked—the method by which they were normally produced.

ROSTOW: Yes. It varies a great deal is the short answer. In the end, however, as the physical history of the drafts will show, President Johnson would design it as it went, and then lay his stamp on it. Now, he didn't lay as much of his stamp on it, in my judgment, as he should have, because he was the best draftsman among us. This goes to one of the really great issues about President Johnson. But whenever he did it was always valuable. His feeling for words was extremely sensitive.

Q: How about extemporaneous additions to prepared drafts? Did he frequently depart from the text?

ROSTOW: Yes, he did sometimes. There's an interesting example of this in what I think historically will be regarded as one of his most important speeches, because it's about

the only place he ever fully articulated a major stand of his policy. This was the New Orleans speech he gave in 1968—I think September. Laid out there after the fact, ex post, is the policy he had been following since, at least, I came aboard in 1966—the policy of consciously building up an alternative between isolationism on the one hand, and over involvement on the other.

Now, the draft as written talked about the policy of partnership and fair shares and moving toward the long-run situation where we were taking our share, no more, no less. Then it illustrated the areas where he, President Johnson, had moved policy in that direction. On the plane—I was just checking this out with Harry Middleton—he added explicitly what we both knew was the reason for this policy. The alternative was a dangerous isolationism. He added a warning against isolationism. I think you'll find that, in his actual statement in New Orleans, he went even beyond what he had added on the plane. It was a demonstration of his understanding of what this was all about. It wasn't simply a movement toward fair shares and partnership because it is right—it is right—but because he feared an isolationist reaction. So he added his explicit warning against isolationism. So you can see in his stamp on that speech his consciousness as to why he had been pursuing this movement toward fair shares and partnership in all the corners of the world—whether it was money or trade or aid or food aid or regionalism.

Q: Did you ever get in trouble by these additions? What comes to my mind immediately in thinking of extemporaneous additions to the draft are some of the statements that drew great criticism, such as the "nervous Nellies" thing in Chicago and the "coonskin on the wall" thing in the Vietnam speech. This doesn't sound like White House draftsmen.

ROSTOW: I think that neither was—I don't know about "nervous Nellie" though the "coonskin on the wall"—I was there at Cam Ranh Bay. But he was saying what he wanted to say.

Q: But that doesn't sound like it came from some cool-headed White House draftsman?

ROSTOW: No, it did not. The “coonskin on the wall” was his reaction to these men. And he meant it about victory. He wasn't talking about marching the U.S. Army into Hanoi. He was talking about actually achieving limited but serious objectives, and that is victory. I've never regarded victory as a bad term so long as you defined your objectives properly. And for men laying their lives out in a difficult war, I don't find that notion that their Commander-in-Chief tells them to go out and win—

Q: And do what they're supposed to be doing—

ROSTOW: That's right. And to achieve their objectives, I don't regard that as wicked, and I don't think the country did. I think there was some New York Times-Newsweek hand wringing about it, but they were hand wringing anyway.

Q: You talk about the White House initiatives. How do you prevent, when you are coming up with ideas—new ideas in your shop—how do you prevent predetermining the acceptance of those ideas by the bureaucracy because they come from the White House?

ROSTOW: I think that's where the Rusk-Rostow concordat came in. They wouldn't rise to the top in the bureaucracy, and the President wouldn't latch on to them unless Rusk had approved.

Q: And it was not automatic that the State Department would buy it because it came from there?

ROSTOW: No, no. One of the rules we laid down in the staff was to draw an extremely careful line between ideas they threw out as individuals and when they were speaking for the White House or the President. I don't think we had real trouble with that. On support for the Latin American summit meeting proposed by Illia, that did come out of the White House. I guess Bill Bowdler and I started that. It was the way I saw to move on regionalism in Latin America. But Linc Gordon was perfectly happy with it when we got it going.

Now, there was another problem we just couldn't solve. There was real resistance, but it was not State Department resistance so much as it was Colombian politics. We put into the speech the President's hope—to get the Pan American Highway completed in his administration. There was a fight in the bureaucracy about that, but they didn't obstruct it. The President wanted to say this, and the opposition was concerned. But the opposition was not bureaucratic. In the end, the reason we didn't get it in our time was because of the Colombian political battle between those who wanted the road to fork left and those who wanted it to fork right.

Q: Right. You have those kind of battles in Austin, Texas, or Washington, D.C.

ROSTOW: This is, you know, the Atlantic and Pacific routes south of Panama.

Q: But you don't feel that the White House shop forecloses alternatives by—?

ROSTOW: No, and the bureaucracy—even Secretary Rusk, who is a very careful man. None of these things was done without Secretary Rusk's blessing. Now, if the President said he wanted to tour Asia, it might not have been exactly what the State Department would have proposed. A presidential trip through Asia is a big enterprise. There are a lot of difficulties to solve, and the bureaucracy had to point to the difficulties. But if the President wanted to do it, then Secretary Rusk buckled down and Bill Bundy went to work on the scenario. We had a hell of a good team working on it. That was a well-managed affair from beginning to end—a moving affair, an important one. But a president is always, I think, driving hard for ideas, especially a strong president like President Johnson.

Q: You mentioned one of the first instructions regarding the staff work in your shop having to come through you. One of the recent analysts, this Patrick Anderson, one of the President's men, suggests that there was a sort of—led by Moyers—a group in the White House staff that went around the National Security side with sort of dovish attitude on Vietnam. Was this a real problem?

ROSTOW: Not to me. President Johnson described to me his relations with Bill Moyers as kind of a young Harry Hopkins. I took the view, not only with President Johnson but in my heart, that nobody serving the president should conceive of himself as having a monopoly on conversation or memos to the president on foreign policy. I took that view even when people wrote the worst kind of letters to me, that foreign policy was not a matter for the happy few or certain parts of the executive branch. It was a mortal matter, and it's too serious a matter for just bureaucrats. If it was at all possible I would write courteous and full answers to hostile letters I received from outside.

As for my colleagues, if they were involved in domestic affairs, what was going on in foreign policy was a terrible burden to them. A fellow like Bill Moyers, who was a presidential adviser over a wide range, and press man and everything—he had a right to ideas about foreign policy.

No, the only thing that the President and Secretary Rusk and I felt was necessary at that stage was to make sure that the flow of paper from the government to the President came through the same channel. And if there was an idea—this was Secretary Rusk's rule with respect to me—an idea which the President was considering, it ought to be available to the Secretary of State so that he could comment upon it. I was prepared to open my shop to Bill Moyers, as I did to George Christian. George started his work in the White House by coming down to my shop.

Q: I didn't know that.

ROSTOW: And really reading in and getting a feel for it. Then we invented something in government—George and I—a little thing, once invented, you wondered how government worked without it. We got a man who worked for both George and me, and his job was to be the coordinator not only between foreign relations and the press shop, but to be the man on the telephone with Defense and State to coordinate at a working level the

responses to foreign policy questions. Dick [Richard] Moose had the job first, and a fellow named Louis Schwartz, second.

Q: That may be why Christian was more successful apparently in his relationship—

ROSTOW: He was successful. We had an extremely close human relationship. And we institutionalized it through this Moose function in which George owned half his body and I the other half. It kept the foreign policy and the press closer together in government than in the past. But it arose from his coming down, and the President saying, “Now, I want George to see everything.” I spent a lot of time with him and loved every minute of it.

Q: Another institutional innovation of the Johnson years that I think predated you, but you had a lot of experience with, is the Tuesday lunch business.

ROSTOW: Oh, yes.

Q: What are your impressions of that as a method of the President exercising his foreign policy direction?

ROSTOW: It was a powerful instrument. About all instruments in government, I've got —the only doctrine I think that makes any sense is the following: the only correct way to organize the government is the way the incumbent president wishes to have it organized. There is no absolutely correct way to do things; it depends on the president's style. And the whole government should reshape itself to the way he wants it. I thought this was an admirable device. It brought together the principal foreign policy advisers of the President on a regular basis—which is important—on a basis of prior staff work because the key questions were sorted out before and if there was any staff work to be done, the President would have that staff work. The men were all prepared on those questions.

Q: There was a formal agenda?

ROSTOW: Every week.

Q: Did you prepare that in your shop?

ROSTOW: I did. I would telephone around on Monday and talk to Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara and see what was going. Very often the items did not require pieces of paper, but sometimes there would be big tabs attached for the President to his agenda. There was always indicated who would lead off the discussion—and a terse description with reference to the tabbed appendix. Then there was always an item called “Other.”

The President would come in, and we would be up there at one o'clock having a glass of sherry or tomato juice or whatever. The President would come in and in a relaxed way talk about whatever was on his mind. Sometimes we would go in directly; sometimes we'd sit around and talk. Then the President would lead the conversation on whatever path he wanted to. Suddenly the agenda would grip, and then we'd march through it.

But the advantage of this device was not only its regularity. It had the relevant principals, and the staff work. It was also a human and quasi-social occasion which underlined a fact which I think for most presidents—not all, but I think President Johnson—should be the case, that these men should regard themselves as a kind of family. They're pulled out of their bureaucracies when they're with the president, and they should be. They're the president's personal advisers. They have the duty of administering bureaucracies. They have the duty to present the interests of the bureaucracies and represent them to the extent that a president ought to take into account their abiding interests. But, in the end, we have a system of government under the Constitution in which only one man is responsible. He's the only one elected, except the vice president. All the rest are hired hands. And the ultimate responsibility of a cabinet member is to the president—and to help him make decisions. Therefore, this apparently informal manner and the treatment of this group of men as family, in the family dining room, had to me an important constitutional meaning—and a correct constitutional meaning. They got used to being together and got

to know each other. They could see, over a period of time, their colleagues reacting to a spectrum of different issues, could understand their preoccupations, the cast of their minds. I think it was good for Bus Wheeler and it was good for everybody that these meetings took place. I don't we think ever had a leak out of the Tuesday lunch.

Q: That would be a remarkable accomplishment in itself.

ROSTOW: I think that's right.

Q: Were the attendees a regular group?

ROSTOW: Yes. Well, sometimes the Vice President would be invited, and sometimes someone in town would be invited. [Arthur] Goldberg would go to a few of them. If Cy Vance were coming through, or [William] Westmoreland, sometimes we'd have them in. Basically it was the President, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the joint Chiefs, the Director of Central Intelligence. I regard it as important in my time that I got the Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as regular members. I don't think that had been regular practice. I wanted the President and [Richard] Helms to establish good direct relationships. I felt it important for the stability of the town in this hard period of military policy for Wheeler to be there. Then, in addition, there was George Christian—and before him Bill Moyers—

Q: Did he keep records incidentally about the—?

ROSTOW: Tom Johnson was the great record keeper. Before that, I don't know who kept the records—Bill Moyers, I guess.

Q: Are they fairly—?

ROSTOW: I can only vouch for Tom Johnson's, which are excellent.

Q: So the accounts of what went on will be available then?

ROSTOW: Oh, very much so. We've already used them. This flap about the President's March 31 decisions—

Q: Yes, I want to get to that when we get into Vietnam.

ROSTOW: I think it was an admirable instrument for President Johnson. I think it was correctly done. You could get through a lot of business in an orderly way with men who knew each other that well.

Q: The problem didn't arise of deciding after they were over what exactly had been decided?

ROSTOW: Oh no, that's a lot of mythology. The decisions were always lucid, and I would immediately go back to my office and transmit them to State, to Ben Read, and record the ones that were not State or Defense. We'd follow up to make sure the Secretary of Defense and Wheeler had acted, but there was never any problem with that on the decisions that were theirs. My secretary would monitor those calls and Brom Smith would always know what the decisions were that were arrived at.

In addition, of course, there was Secretary Rusk. Secretary Rusk would often say, “Now, I'll be too busy. Will you tell Ben Read and get that cable out?” or transmit whatever we had decided. The reason the mythology grew in the town that there were no records is that certain decisions were made that were carried out without the bureaucracy as a whole being engaged. We'd send a back-channel message somewhere, or Secretary Rusk would personally see Dobrynin without letting the whole department know what was afoot.

Now a bureaucracy lives on information. Especially it wants to know, more than anything else, what the bosses are doing. But there's a certain range of decisions that every president will discover, if he doesn't know it initially, he cannot let the bureaucracy get into because they'll leak. He can't take the risk. And that's where the mythology comes in. The

Tuesday lunch was a very orderly exercise, as it should have been. It was the NSC—the regular meeting of the NSC-

Q: That was what I was going to ask. How did it compare to the Kennedy Ex-Com [Executive Committee] or the Eisenhower NSC, or what's now apparently the new NSC in the Nixon—?

ROSTOW: Well, I don't know how the latter works. Present were the characters who were relevant to decisions. Now, the USIA man isn't relevant to major decisions, and in certain ones, the secretary of the Treasury is, but when we had major matters involving the Secretary of the Treasury, he was there. The advice to the President came in different forms. You'd have a Middle East meeting sometimes with one group of characters, including the assistant secretary for the Middle East. If you had monetary meetings, you'd have Bill Martin and Joe Fowler and Fred Deming.

Q: Almost impossible to write a statute including the relevant people for any conceivable crisis.

ROSTOW: So a president has got to get his ideas in the most convenient ways from just the people he wants and just the way he wants it. There's no way to write the book once and for all on this matter. Every president has got to work it out. President Johnson worked it out well, in my judgment, for his purposes, and I hope President Nixon works it out well for his.

Q: Before I turn to a substantive issue now in the case of Vietnam, are there any things about the staff operation that you think we haven't mentioned that you think are important here that I have no way of knowing about?

ROSTOW: No. I think from 1966 on we got good people. I think the President became comfortable that there were no leaks, that they were discreet people and loyal to him. I think they developed a collegial sense among themselves and with me. I tended—as I got

to know them—to give more and more responsibility to them and let them grow as high as they could grow. I also made a point of trying to get the President to see them—to get them into meetings with the President so that the President had the sense that it wasn't just Rostow and some faceless fellows down there who might be off talking to the New York Times, but that he had a stalwart group of men who were his men, just as much as I was. And the President did develop relations with those men, which I encouraged, so that if I were away, if I were on vacation—the shop could run. I think we had a pretty good professional and efficient and mutually loyal shop there. On the whole, I was proud of that group of men. And whenever the going got rough, you'd have a war in the Middle East, these men would rise to it. Or if you had trouble in Latin America, there was Bill Bowdler—one of the best bureaucrats and the most creative I've ever known. Hal Saunders, and then Ed Fried, was remarkable—just altogether good value.

Q: Let's turn to Vietnam. One of the questions that seems likely to cause a certain amount of difficulty for the future scholars is going to be the business of the nature of the original commitment when Mr. Johnson was suddenly propelled into the presidency. Some of President Kennedy's friends have speculated at length about what Kennedy would or would not have done had he lived and so on. Can you give some insight into what the nature of that situation was at the time of the change, and perhaps, if you think it's fruitful, even some speculation, based on your intimacy with President Kennedy, as to whether or not what some of his friends have subsequently said has any validity or not?

ROSTOW: I know as well as any single man, I suspect, the cast of President Kennedy's mind about Southeast Asia and Vietnam in general as he made his fundamental decision, which was the decision in 1961. He made several decisions in 1961. I cannot vouch for his exact frame of mind in 1962 and 1963—although I think I know something of that—simply because I was not in the White House then working on Vietnam. But the decisions he made in 1961 he regarded as fundamental, and those I believe I do understand.

It starts—so far as Vietnam is concerned—when he took office. He was briefed by President Eisenhower on the nineteenth of January, 1961, on the major issues. We have three sets of notes on that meeting. There's a [Clark?] Clifford set and a Chris [Christian] Herter set and a McNamara set. It's clear from all of them that President Eisenhower told President Kennedy that the situation in Laos was militarily and politically disintegrating and it was possible that he would have to face the issue of putting troops into Laos. So he came in with that foreshadowed as a burden.

Now on the thirteenth day after he was in office—it was a Thursday—I came to him for the second of the Thursday afternoon meetings that he had set up to take stock with me. You've got to understand that I had been working with him since early 1958. I had worked with him on foreign policy all through the campaign. We were very much of an age. Now, once he was president, he was president, of course. The relationships were different. But still, at the beginning he asked that we meet these Thursdays just to take stock of where we were.

And the second one, early in February, I came in and Andy Goodpaster had given me a copy of a memorandum written by Ed Lansdale on the basis of a trip he had made to Vietnam in January, 1961. It's a vivid picture Of disintegration. Andy said, “I think President Kennedy ought to see this.” He'd overlapped with us a few weeks. I read it; I agreed he should see it. It was an ominous draft.

I came in that Thursday and said, “Mr. President, I think you ought to read this.”

He said, “I've only got a half-hour today. I've got an appointment afterwards. Can you summarize it?”

I said, “No, sir. I think you must read it.”

“I may have no time for anything else. Must I read it?”

I said, “Yes, sir.” And he read it all. He read very quickly and with great retention.

He looked up and he said, “That's the worst one we've got, isn't it? I'll tell you something. President Eisenhower never mentioned the word Vietnam to me.” But he realized from the beginning, when he read this picture of the beginnings of infiltration, the revival of the war again, that this would be the worst one.

Q: And there was little question, even that early, as to the aggressive nature—?

ROSTOW: No, no. There was no doubt that they were activating their cadres in the South and infiltrating those re-grouped in the North in 1954. He immediately instructed me to get to work on this, and that was when I got him these books on—I got him Khrushchev's early January speech on wars of national liberation, and got him Mao [Zedong], and got working on this. I was already engaged in Laos and went down to [Fort] Bragg. We had a lot of things that I got started on there—helicopters and special forces.

But he then had the crisis in Laos. And, of course, from that moment on he had to make a fundamental assessment as to whether he was going to stay in Southeast Asia or not. He looked at it hard and forced us into a devil's advocate position on what would happen if we got out; would it hold; were there enough inherent forces there to build on?

He came to two conclusions in the course of the year 1961. Conclusion one was that we couldn't afford to get out and turnover Southeast Asia to the communists. He did one of the bravest things a president ever did in May—I think it was May. At a time when the usable reserves of the United States were very thin—he inherited a very weak conventional force reserve position from the Eisenhower Administration—and he had an ultimatum in Berlin, and these divisions committed to Berlin. They were pushing down from the Plaine des Jarres toward the Mekong. He had about ten thousand marines in Okinawa; that was about all he had. The question was, should we land them in Laos through Thailand? He had a congressional leadership meeting. As I recall the records—

I was not present—he had everybody against him in doing this, except Bridges—Styles Bridges.

Q: That's great support for—

ROSTOW: But he looked at it, and it was a hell of a gamble. But he began to load those marines. Of course, the espionage out of Okinawa—the Russians knew it, and they came rushing around to the British and said, “Well, let's have a conference,” and this movement down from Plaine des Jarres to the Mekong stopped. It was a hell of a gamble.

And at Vienna, when Khrushchev, dressed up in his marshal's uniform, was scratching the hair on his chest and threatening terrible things on Berlin like a schoolboy, I think there are three references to Laos. I'm not sure. You'd have to check the record on the Kennedy-Khrushchev exchange in Vienna. Khrushchev asked, “You were going to put troops into Laos?”

That was the beginning of the turnaround in the power relationship between Khrushchev and Kennedy. But he wasn't going to give up Southeast Asia right down to the end, there's no doubt about it. And in September 1963 he made the flattest statement of the domino theory that anyone ever made. He believed it, and he was right. There's nobody in Asia who doesn't understand that if we pull out of Vietnam, we'd have to pull out of all of Asia, the place would fall.

I heard him once march through the implications of this when he finally decided. I later heard President Johnson talking to some Australian television or radio people—maybe only a year before he left the White House or less. It came out of the same place, that if we pulled out, 1) you'd have a big debate in the United States at least, 2) the country could turn isolationist, 3) the communists would start to think that the world was their oyster and start to move in some way. Finally, the United States wouldn't sit still for a shift in the balance of power, and we'd come plunging back in, having kidded the communists again

—but this time in a nuclear environment. He had exactly the chain of thought—President Johnson had—that I'd heard President Kennedy outline.

So first, he decided that, with all its pain, he couldn't give up Southeast Asia, and that was the only relevant decision because when General Taylor and I were out there, it wasn't as bad as it was in early 1965, but we concluded—and everyone concluded—that it was a matter of months before it caved in, the way it was going toward the end of 1961.

Second decision: he decided that if he had to fight in Southeast Asia, he's rather fight in Vietnam than in Laos. The reasons were the following: first, logistically, you have better access; second, you have this great arc of the Mekong which is way up there in the belly of Asia and distant from Thai ports. All roads we now have weren't built. So it's a long front, whereas the front is shorter in Vietnam. (But the Vietnam front also proved long as infiltration developed along the Cambodian as well as Laos borders.) Third, you could use air and naval power to a great extent. And fourth, in Laos you're on the Chinese border. In Vietnam you've got the cushion of North Vietnam between you and China. Therefore there was less chance, if you defended Southeast Asia basically in Vietnam, of getting into a war with China.

Those were his two fundamental judgments.

Q: And these were Kennedy—?

ROSTOW: Kennedy judgments. I'm now telling you Kennedy's thoughts, which I know intimately as I was his man on this, and we had no problems in communication, because we were old friends.

Q: Does this mean that as a matter of fact—reality—that when Mr. Johnson became president, undoing these decisions would have been, certainly not impossible, but extremely difficult?

ROSTOW: Well, the form in which President Johnson fell—let's just take it quickly through what happened. As a result of the Taylor mission decisions and some things that [Ngo Dinh] Diem did in 1962, 1962 was a good year. Things got better. I personally never was confident that this would work because I didn't believe that, with an open frontier and continued infiltration, you could handle a guerrilla war. That goes back to the nature of guerrilla war and the role of frontiers and infiltration in them.

But, nevertheless, we were negotiating in Laos. We got a good Laos agreement in July. It went into effect in October, so my mind focused on making that Laos agreement stick.

Now, we knew from the first day the agreement went into effect in early October that Hanoi was not honoring it. They did not put their forces out. They continued to transit Laos. I felt strongly about this, that if we were to avoid a big war, we had to make that agreement stick. And I began to badger people in the State Department right from October.

Then came the Cuban missile crisis. And then [Anastas] Mikoyan came calling on the President. I had a channel, which President Kennedy had set up, for sending memoranda to him through Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln. I wrote a memorandum to Secretary Rusk urging that we make it a federal case with Mikoyan when he came, saying, “To hell with Cuba. That's behind us now. But Southeast Asia is going to be really bad.” The Russians, through [Georgi] Pushkin, had promised [Averell] Harriman that they would take responsibility for Hanoi's honoring the Laos accords of 1962.

So I launched this campaign—it was one of the very few times when, from the State Department, I pressed on an issue hard—that we had to use the Mikoyan visit to force the issue. And as I said in a New York Times interview, which you may have seen at the end of the Johnson Administration, my biggest single regret about the eight years in foreign policy was that we didn't make it a federal case in October 1962.

Q: Right from the very beginning.

ROSTOW: And I explained why. I did not say in the interview that I advocated it. He tried to press me. I said I'm not doing history; I'm just saying we may face other agreements, and I believe that it is essential that we make sure they're scrupulously honored. And I'm worried now about the agreements, the understandings we had on the bombing cessation. Because the communists will always push you. They push you, and they think they're going to get away with it—and we're not a country that stands for it. Then we come roaring back and we've got to do more later than if we were scrupulous and instant in our reactions. I'd immediately add, as I did in that interview, that this is a very hard thing for a democracy to do from a standing start.

But, nevertheless, things continued to get better right up through the spring of 1963. Then a crisis arose, which I think I understand pretty well. It arose from the decay of Diem's mind, almost, and capacity, and the attempt by brother Nhu to take over the establishment. And instead of running it as an old-fashioned mandarin autocrat who had a certain legitimacy, as well as familiarity as a type, because he had pulled together that country against all odds from 1954 on, the Vietnamese political establishment from one end to the other was not about to accept brother Nhu. Now, the Buddhist revolt was just a symptom in May 1963 of that uneasiness. And then, of course, the political situation disintegrated and the military situation began gradually to reflect that disintegration. Then Diem was killed, and Nhu, and you got into a phase, really, of political horror in Vietnam.

Now, somewhere in the course of that political disintegration Hanoi made absolutely fresh decisions.

Q: This in late 1963?

ROSTOW: Some time in that period there, or early 1964—some time. I don't recall the time. Probably it would be establishable in terms of actions they took. Early in 1963 there was an almost open debate. There's a lot of intelligence evidence of what I'm about to say that some communists felt the war had failed and said, “Let's knock it off.” The opening

up of this politically monstrous situation in Saigon gave them hope, and they started, in a sense, a new war by introducing regular North Vietnamese units, and so on, which began in mid-1964. And you had disintegration of the situation throughout 1964.

In the meanwhile, of course, the number of advisers that were put in had increased from President Kennedy's time—they were up to about 25,000 [21,500].

Q: When he died, 25,000 [21,500].

ROSTOW: That's right. So President Johnson inherited a situation disintegrating diplomatically, disintegrating militarily, with quite a lot of U.S. advisers on the spot. So his decision—if he were to reverse—he faced very simple alternatives in 1965. Acknowledge [that] you've got disaster, and get your men out immediately. Go on doing what you're doing and then you'll face a disaster in a measurable period of time, and you may have trouble getting your men out. Or put men in. That was in 1965.

I do not know, however, the nature of the discussion with President Johnson in 1964. I may discover it in the course of my work with President Johnson here, but it's an odd—extremely minor—fact that a fellow who is associated with President Johnson's Vietnam decisions was absolutely out of them in the time they were made. So I did not live through the decisions of that period. In that time I was the head of the Planning Council, doing my CIAP work, and making some trips. I made a trip in a crucial period in 1965. I was going around Latin America for CIAP. Later on in the spring I was out in Asia. So I honestly do not know the considerations.

But the commitment of men was greater than it was in President Kennedy's time. The situation was more palpably serious than it was in October 1961 when General Taylor—although we came to the same conclusion as the men in 1965, namely, that defeat was in sight in a matter of months unless we moved. The war had gotten bigger in scale on both sides between 1961 and 1965, so it was a more palpable discontinuity of policy to throw in

your hand in 1965 than in 1961, and, of course, what President Johnson had to decide in terms of U.S. forces was much greater than anything President Kennedy did.

My own net judgment, for what it is worth, is that, if President Kennedy had not been killed, he would have made the same decisions as President Johnson, and quite possibly made them earlier.

Q: Do you know if during that period when you were not really close to the decision discussions if there were significant individuals, or groups of individuals, who were opposing making those decisions—in other words, who were arguing for the alternative, as you mentioned, of either withdrawing our people or doing something that would lead—?

ROSTOW: I know that in the debates in 1965 George Ball presented the devil's advocate view of not putting more troops in. Whether he did that out of conviction, which is possible, or because the President wanted him to, I don't know. But I'm now talking about matters which I'll have to construct as an historian through which I simply didn't live.

Q: I've heard recently Bill Moyers, for example, I think in the post-speech wrap up after Mr. Johnson's speech in January of this year, say among other things that there was widespread opposition and dissent to the Vietnamese policy by the last part of 1965 and early part of 1966, which is roughly when you went back to the White House.

ROSTOW: That was a hell of a time to go into opposition, because you had already made your troop commitment.

Q: Is it accurate that there were great numbers of people—?

ROSTOW: I wouldn't say that. I know people who were unhappy about our Vietnam policy. Everybody was unhappy about Vietnam. Men were being killed, for goodness sake! But I never heard an alternative presented by anyone. There was a lot of hand wringing, and, “Gee, I don't like it,” and “Can't we negotiate,” but the President said, “By all means,

let's negotiate." But I never heard Bill Moyers or—George Ball was the nearest to being honest. He almost, but not quite, would be willing to say, "All right, we'll accept all the consequences, the collapse of Southeast Asia and the Asian balance of power."

But the trouble with the opposition to Vietnam was that very few people accepted the consequences of an alternative policy.

You see, the opposition, except for a very few candid people, has been based on the implicit assumption that there's something we could have done that would have gotten us peace and stability in Asia and not a bigger war, other than what we were doing. Very few people would say, "All right, I don't care what happens to Asia. I don't care if we bug out. I don't care if everything down to Djakarta goes communist. I don't care if they take Burma and the strategic approaches to India and Pakistan. I just don't want any part of Asia."

The nearest to that is Walter Lippmann's view that we should not have pacts with folks except of the same culture like New Zealand and Australia. Now, that's a view I disagree with, but that's a view you can argue with.

The problem with arguing with the New York Times or Fulbright or Newsweek or [Eugene] McCarthy is that they will not stand up in public and say, "I accept the consequences of pulling our troops out. I think we should just leave Asia alone and let them have a big war out there. We won't get into it. China, India—we're just going to wash them out from the U.S. national interest. We're going to wash out our treaties and wash out the concept which has governed our policy throughout this century." I've never heard a man in government, whether it was Goldberg or Ball or Moyers and any of the other doves, or neo-doves, soon-or-late doves, really walk up to it in that way. That is what every sober analysis led you to. That was the bind in which President Kennedy found himself; that was the choice the President had to make.

Q: What was the response of President Johnson to people who clearly came to him with their case against what he was doing in government?

ROSTOW: Oh, he'd listen to them all, and he worried, and he searched for alternatives.

Q: Did he try to argue with them, convince them, or just listen to them?

ROSTOW: Well, it depended on the occasion. But he searched out—he spent a lot more time than anyone knows with Bill Fulbright, alone, in that little back room in the presidential office. Lord knows, if there was an alternative consistent with his constitutional oath and with his view of the consequences for the United States and the world, he was looking. He had a bigger vested interest in finding it than anyone else, and so did President Kennedy. President Kennedy didn't latch on to it in the 1961 decisions without thinking about it, asking “Isn't there some other way!” But they concluded that there wasn't, and I've never, after eight years of it, never seen any other way.

Q: There are really two arguments. There is one, I suppose, over the tactics that we were following in the bombing and so on; and another one over the whole concept of whether we should have been involved there in the first place. Were most of the critics interested only in tactics, or were most of them—?

ROSTOW: A lot of the argument would be marginal about whether you should bomb oil or not, but that wasn't really what the difference was about.

Q: The conceptual differences was the one that—

ROSTOW: I just don't know. To this day I don't know what Bill Moyers really thought about —or thinks in retrospect—about Vietnam, what he would have us do. There are situations in public life, as in private life, where your realistic options are very narrow. It's no good pretending that there's some soft option. Most of the critics are people who, as it were, pretend there's a soft option between the total failure and loss of that strategic area, with

all its consequences to the world balance of power and a lot of things. I've gone through all this with the greatest sympathy for all the critics of Vietnam. I mean they don't—

Q: You could hardly miss hearing them, I have to admit.

ROSTOW: I once talked to a group of graduate students from Columbia. Toward the end they came down to Washington. One of them asked me at the very end, “How can you live with yourself, having advocated an immoral war in Vietnam?” And the rest of them—I think very few were pro-Vietnam—they were all shocked at the man who put the question that way.

I said, “One is, is any war moral? That's a really good question; every mature man, I think, has got to ask himself if he's going to be a pacifist, if war is just as horrible as we think it is. And I think you have to come to that conclusion first, and reluctantly I concluded there were, with all the horrors of war, worse things than war. And I'm of a generation that happens to have seen a lot of war. No one hates it more than those who have had to see it. The second question then is, is this war particularly more immoral than others?” Then I went through the reasons why this war, in my view, is legitimate.

I could have ended it there, but then I added something which, as an old teacher, I knew caught them, because you could almost hear a pin drop. I said, “Now, I want to add a word. I want you to concentrate for a moment on who Lyndon Johnson is and who Dean Rusk is, because those are really the central figures. I'm a tertiary figure.” Then I talked about the President's motives in getting into politics, and how he switched over from teaching, on the advice of this superintendent who brought him forward, because he felt he could do more for people—he had in mind those Mexican kids more than anyone else at that time—and how his whole life has been devoted in politics to using it as an instrument for helping people to a better life.

And who was Rusk! Delivered by a vet in a poor town in Georgia, head of the Rockefeller Foundation when it was working day and night for the simple needs of humanity and

developing the rice and wheat seeds that are now revolutionizing the world. These are men who have not only a knowledge of the South and its problems and, therefore, a mature and deeply rooted feeling about the need for racial equality, but they are both men who came from parts of the country which were poor. They saw in the span of their lifetime what could be done in less than a half-century of progress. They cared about progress in the world as well as in this country.

I said, “I evoke these two men as human beings. Do you really think that men of this kind would have committed this nation to a war if they did not feel that it was the lesser of evils? Are you really sure that the moral values that they would bring to bear on this decision are any less than yours?” Then I made a few comments about myself and my interest in development.

This is the kind of business it was, and no one entered it joyously, but you don't take a piece of public responsibility without walking up to those things. A president can't pretend that there are soft options. It's going to be revealed to the country. He lives with the terrible reality of a nuclear age. You write an editorial and it goes away. The president makes decisions of consequences—the result are there for him and the country.

Q: Do you think that maybe the administration made less of an effort to explain or sell the war than might have been made?

ROSTOW: It's a hard thing to do, to evaluate that. I don't think that the major critics could have been appeased by anything more that could have been said. There are two issues, however—or even three—that are worthy of historical retrospective.

One, should President Johnson have, as he committed these troops, broken out the flags and the bands, and really said, “All right, America is going to war and we're going to win,” and generate the wave of patriotism to do it? He consciously tried to keep that damped because it was a limited war, and for a complex [number] of reasons.

Secondly, could he have used military power in a way that would have forced the go-no-go decision on Hanoi, Moscow, and Peking, at some higher risk of a larger war—how much—notably with respect to mining the harbors or trying to cut the infiltration routes on the ground north of the DMZ, but not very far north and so on? That's a really serious issue for history.

And the third issue which transcends Vietnam, but includes it, and in my judgment is the issue that historians will spend time on about President Johnson, is why he in public never exposed himself fully. Those who had the privilege of working for him, and the press—even the hostile press—would see him in the second half of his day—after his nap until his late dinner—six to eight, in there. Sometimes he would get rolling in this little office and talk. I know in the first weeks I was there, I knew immediately this was one of the great privileges of my life—to hear him talk about whatever it was, because you knew this was a great man, a man of immense subtlety of mind, of great intelligence, experience, with a style that was vivid and authentic. He had passages of extraordinary rhetoric. I don't suppose he ever had an aide who didn't write him a memo saying, “You've got to go on television and talk the way you talk to us.” I've had newspapermen, you know, who were writing hostile things, saying, “If he only could reveal to the country the way he is, the view of him as president would be radically different.'' It must have amused him to get these memos from me as a new boy at school. I talked to Mrs. Johnson, but it was an old story, obviously.

I remember at one stage we had a White House staff meeting. Marvin Watson was chairman for a time, and we all got to discussing this, and there was unanimity about it. But he never would do it. I think the country really doesn't know Lyndon Johnson fully. They have inklings, but they don't know him. The roots of this shyness I don't wholly understand. It may be that he felt that when he got going he might say things that he shouldn't say in public.

It's an extraordinary fact that his press conferences are, in terms of grammar and coherence, far better than Kennedy's or, of course, Eisenhower's. When he spoke, even off the cuff, he spoke under discipline—by the book—great logic, coherence, sentences, paragraphs, order. And he may have feared his natural style.

I suspect there may be another dimension to it: that he was afraid that his natural style would be regarded by the East Coast establishment as corny or provincial or rural or something—in which case he was profoundly wrong, because when he did talk informally to these people, they all knew they were in the presence of a great man. The anecdotes and the Texas roots were things that every man who heard knew were grand and authentic and not provincial. But I don't know the answer. I know it's the biggest single question about the Johnson Administration in my judgment.

Q: And one that can only be answered by the kind of depth that we're trying to get perhaps, hopefully, in this.

ROSTOW: I think perhaps if he had talked about Vietnam in this way, just as he did, to the people—not from speeches that were fabricated by McPherson and Rostow or Mac Bundy and all the rest, that he could have carried the country with him. But those are the three questions.

Q: I take it that one of the things you're saying here is that the people who criticized had access to the information—the factual information, really—that was necessary for them to come to the same conclusions that the administration had come to. It wasn't a lack of factual knowledge that led the critics into their position, really?(Interruption)

—drive toward negotiations. You apparently were not close to whatever there was in the 1964-1965 period. So the first major one of your era would be, I expect, the one that's tagged Marigold.

ROSTOW: Oh, there is a lot more than Marigold.

Q: Any that got that far—

ROSTOW: Yes. There's Marigold—I guess that's right. That was the Polish game. But I think I'd leave the history of the negotiations to the negotiating record. I can tell you my own views about it. But there's a lot more. When the record is revealed, the number of contacts, and the number of efforts—there are many more than is generally known, and they are all over the map. So I don't think this is the place for me to try to reconstruct, without records, a full listing of them. You may have a question about Marigold, and I may have—

Q: This is the one that has gotten, I suppose, the greatest public exposure because of the [David] Kraslow-[Stuart] Loory very deep-sounding investigative reporting job they did on it. Of course, I think the general burden of their argument is that while we were carrying these things on, in fact we were probably never prepared to negotiate on terms that could remotely have been considered acceptable to the other side.

ROSTOW: I don't know. They may then have to form a judgment as to what the negotiating position on the other side was. What happened, essentially, was that the Poles, I am now convinced, without a full Hanoi commitment, worked out with Lodge these broad ten points, which had great ambiguities in them, but they were ambiguities enough to start a talk. Then they had the problem of bombing. This was explicitly left aside. They talked about the A-B formula; that is to say, we'd stop bombing as A, and then they would do certain compensatory things as B, without any formal links—although with full prior understanding.

What happened, in my judgment, is that when the proposal was finally brought back to Hanoi, they said, “To hell with it.” My guess is that it was an attempt by Hanoi to use the Poles to find out what our negotiating position would be. The reason I take that view is

that we produced a fellow on the doorstep in Warsaw ready to talk; the North Vietnamese did not show, and then you could just see the Poles struggling. They used the bombing around Hanoi as an excuse. But then we put a circle around Hanoi for a while. It's palpable to me that the Poles did not have a solid undertaking with Hanoi. There was nothing that we did in this period that could have broken up that negotiation, if they were serious, among other reasons because, quite explicitly, the ten points were independent of the bombing business. The bombing business was to be solved later on an A-B formula.

Q: And that was very explicitly understood?

ROSTOW: Oh, yes, sure. So the Poles just covered their tracks as best they could. The Poles reminded me in this circumstance of a Polish story about the peasant who had a lovely daughter. He was a widower. The marriage broker of the village comes to the peasant and says, “I'd like your daughter to marry Prince So-and-so. I know she's lovely, and she's your only support, but he's a charming fellow. She'd have a great life.”

The peasant weeps, and finally reluctantly he said, “All right. She can marry the prince.”

The marriage broker heaves a sigh, and says, “Ah, now for the Prince.” I've told this to Poles and they just laugh when I tell them the story because they know it's basically right. They never had Hanoi sewed up.

Q: So the fact that our bombing of the Hanoi area, again, was not really so critical as—?

ROSTOW: It couldn't be, given the terms of the talks in Saigon between Lodge and this Pole, [Janusz] Lewandowski. It just couldn't be, because they had the bombing thing explicitly separate—an eleventh item with the A-B formula.

Q: Now, that A-B formula, apparently when you pursued that into the next year through [John C.] Guthrie and then through the [Chester] Cooper mission to London, too.

ROSTOW: That's right.

Q: There's some confusion in what has been published about that as regards whether or not we withdrew that A-B offer.

ROSTOW: Well, we had to deal with the fact, which is during the Tet stand-down there was a pouring of resources down toward the DMZ.

Q: That coincided in time.

ROSTOW: That's right. That was a problem, but we gave them a perfectly good formula. It was just palpable that they weren't ready to go at that time. They just weren't ready to go. I don't know what the politics were in Hanoi. They hadn't come to the conclusion that the best they could get was what we were likely to offer.

Q: What about all the private diplomatic efforts that were going on around that time? Did they hinder importantly what we were trying to do—the [Harry] Ashmore-[William] Baggs mission and certain other ones?

ROSTOW: I don't think so, although they tended to create an environment of over-eagerness that may have misled them. But as I was just saying on the phone to Henry Kissinger, Hanoi has had enough experience with the U.S. government to know there can be all sorts of noises offstage, but they, as good communists, look at that situation on the ground, and they see what the government's position is, and they shouldn't be misled. But I don't really know what Hanoi's view of all of these negotiations was. There were obviously playing with these people quite cynically, and trying to build up the peace movement here. They're middle-aged and elderly men fixated on their experiences in the past. They know they won against the French because they won in Paris politically. The New York Times and Newsweek and Ashmore-Baggs and Lippmann are parallels out of

their experience in France. They take any steps they can to keep that kind of thing going—and Fulbright and the rest of it are important, serious—deadly serious—pawns to play with.

Q: From their viewpoint?

ROSTOW: From their viewpoint. Anything that can hop that up. And they give a lot of time to it. But they would look at them that way, how to keep them active in the peace movement—by peace movement, they mean U.S. withdrawal, unconditional withdrawal. They don't do these things because they are interested in diplomacy.

Q: One of those private or semi-private efforts involved in that very same period, February of 1967, was the Robert Kennedy difficulty which blew up then into the confrontation with Mr. Johnson. You were, were you not, present at that meeting?

ROSTOW: I was there.

Q: Can you give us some description of that that might straighten out some of the various accounts of that?

ROSTOW: As I remember it, it started off—

Q: Let's change tapes before you start that off.

ROSTOW: Let me recall this meeting between Senator [Robert] Kennedy and the President. As I remember it, it started off with Senator Kennedy giving a report on his trip to Europe in which he said that the Europeans were disturbed by Vietnam and uneasy—just gave a factual report—and that the bombing issue, as I remember, was strongly felt in various places in Europe.

Then there was the question of what it was that [Etienne] Manac'h said to Kennedy. And as I recall it—it's a matter of record, so it's not very important for us to clarify it—as I remember, Kennedy said that what Manac'h had said didn't strike him as of particular

interest but that some American junior officer in the embassy, who had accompanied Senator Kennedy, thought it was interesting, and he had filed a dispatch. Whatever it was leaked into the press in some obscure way and set up notions that Senator Kennedy hit paydirt in Paris or found some kind of give.

Q: When even he didn't claim to have done so?

ROSTOW: When he did not claim to have done so. That led to the question: if that was Senator Kennedy's view—namely, that he didn't understand what it was about—where did the story start? Kennedy thought it had probably come out of Washington on the basis of the dispatch from the junior officer in Paris. Now, what it was this officer thought he got out of Manac'h that was new, I don't know. Manac'h was a famous thumb-sucker who—a little like these Poles—would throw off, on the basis of a conversation with the North Vietnamese, some idea, but you never could sort out whether it was Manac'h or whether it was North Vietnamese, and nothing ever came of it. And I just don't remember precisely the point here.

The interview with the President was cool; it was restrained. There were no threats by President Johnson, as some reporters have said. It was not warm, but it was orderly. I did not regard it as a major event until all of these stories began to come out about things that President Johnson was alleged to have said that he never did say—stories about the mood, which were different from the mood as I observed it. Now, at that time it was clear that the two men were not comfortable with each other.

I was present at another interview between President Johnson and Senator Kennedy which was of great interest, I found, and in its own way rather moving. This was after the President had announced his decision not to run. It would have been April 3, I think.

Q: 1968?

ROSTOW: Correct. 1968. Senator Kennedy came in with Ted Sorensen. Charlie Murphy and I were there with President Johnson. Both Murphy and I took full notes of the meeting. That was the morning we got some sort of a first indication from Hanoi of a possibly positive reply to the President's speech. There was a briefing on the situation in Vietnam, and then, at Senator Kennedy's instigation, probing as to what President Johnson's position in the campaign would be. President Johnson clearly didn't intend to be out campaigning or overtly throwing his weight around, but he reserved his rights as a citizen. He made it clear that he felt very close to Vice President Humphrey, and, in a sense, answered Senator Kennedy—he was responsive by saying, “On balance, I'm going to support Vice President Humphrey.” But he wasn't going to get himself in the position of, let's say, President Truman in 1956 with Harriman, or something like that.

Then there was a note, obviously authentic and touching, in which President Johnson recalled his connection with President Kennedy; how he had worked with him. He felt that President Kennedy had dealt with him A-plus from his end, and he was probably a B-minus vice president, because it was a hard job. He thought that Hubert had done a better job as vice president in the sense of being able to live with its constraints. Then he went on and talked about his attitude toward President Kennedy and the family, and his loyalty to the Kennedy people and cabinet, and to the policies and commitments. He felt like a junior partner whose senior partner had died, and he had to move in. He felt the responsibility for the continuity of the whole enterprise. He said very quietly that, “Somewhere up there President Kennedy would agree that I've done so.” This evoked from Robert Kennedy a rather remarkable, and I think sincere statement. He could vouch for that, that their differences had been overestimated. President Johnson said, “If you sat here, your views would be very much more like mine than they've been, so that the differences have been overdone.” That was a rather moving occasion. I suspect it was the last occasion those two men talked with each other.

Q: And not typical of those confrontations that have generally been reported.

ROSTOW: That is correct. Some day I think people will feel a little better when they read that one in the record. I'd glad the notes were full, and you've got two accounts of it.

Q: Both sides. Interesting—talking about the exaggerated versions of the press account of the earlier meeting between the President and Senator Kennedy—blown into a rather major thing of anger. Now, we're getting this difficulty that you mentioned a while ago on the phone of the [Washington- Post-Newsweek accounts of the decisions that finally did lead up to partial cessation of the bombing—the talks. I notice the office down here has issued a statement that they are substantially inaccurate.(Interruption)

Q: Can you clear up what the difficulties are in regard to—?

ROSTOW: It's hardly worth using tape on this because the story will be told by President Johnson. We made a test, as it were, of the viability of President Johnson's materials and reconstructed it. I don't want to go into it at any length, but briefly we were in negotiations right down into Tet via a third party—the Romanians—on the San Antonio formula. President Johnson understood when he saw this winter-spring offensive coming—on which he was very well informed—that there was no hope of a negotiation until after they got that off their chest. And he so told the Australians. I commend the historian to the notes on the meeting in Canberra. He said, “This isn't the time to stop bombing. Perhaps when they've tried this and failed”—he predicted kamikaze tactics, desperate efforts to get a tactical victory—”That might be an opportunity to move toward peace.” Because he knew this big effort was coming. After it, he had to weigh the military situation, and he did very carefully. His own press conference and other statements, I think you'll find, hold up well in retrospect as evaluations. One of my prizes was that the flow, which wasn't my intelligence at all, but the flow of material to the President before Tet and after Tet gave him, I think, a good feeling for what was actually happening, as opposed to what the papers said. And he was not surprised. In fact, in anticipation be flew the 101st Airborne out there in December, at great expense, to get everything he could out there to Westy [Westmoreland] before the thing blew. Then he was looking for the moment to resume the

peace offensive. He couldn't do that until he felt that the military situation was stabilized, and that they had been turned back, and that Hanoi knew it had been turned back. And in March that became clear.

Now, as for who proposed the limited bombing cessation, the first record we have of this is a meeting, I think about March 3 or 4, and it was Secretary Rusk who proposed it. The President's response was, “Get on your horses on that; staff it out.” Secretary Rusk produced the memorandum about the twenty-fifth, and he was working on it all during the month, and I have a copy of that. Clark Clifford was sworn in, I think, on March 1, and he came—and we have some exchanges between Rusk and Clifford on this, in which Clifford proposes that we make the bombing cessation conditional on their behavior, and Mac Bundy and Rusk say, “Well, no, you've got to do it, and if they don't respond, resume. But you've got to make it unconditional.”

The story, as a matter of simple record of how it all came about, will surprise people if they've been taken in by this: One, because the President had a complete vision before Tet, a) that it was coming, and b) when it might be proper to look for another peace initiative, including a bombing halt. Two, that the idea, in our records, first comes via Rusk and the President's immediate response was, “Get on with the staff work.” And twice I am instructed by the President to make sure they're working on it. Three, the only debate that took place was the debate on this question of conditional/unconditional, which was Rusk versus Clifford—Clifford a little more hawkish. Then the question of Gold-berg's proposition that we have a total cessation of the bombing of the North, which no one else would buy because we had an intense battlefield situation. We had to protect the area north of the DMZ. That was the only substantial debate, but no one was with Goldberg on that. It was just too active a military situation.

The timing was determined by the convergence of a) when the President was confident that things were stabilized on the ground, and to make sure of that he sent Wheeler out to Manila secretly to talk to Westmoreland on the twenty-third. He talked to him on the

twenty-fourth of March. So face-to-face, he had confirmation that the very limited troops we were going to send were okay. Though, in effect, on the fifteenth of March Westy informed Washington—and I made sure the President saw it—that he was going on the offensive in I Corps around the first of April when the weather cleared up. We were pretty confident then that the B-52s had done the job at Khe Sanh. We weren't going to worry about that. Two, the package: we had to work that out, and that became a package essentially of the things that we could get Westy in the short run, plus the modernization of the South Vietnamese. And the whole issue of the 200,000 withered away with the improvement of the military situation, and a lot of other things. No need to go into that. And third, the timing was determined by the President's private judgment that when he made his peace move, he'd announce his withdrawal from the race.

That was determined in part by the date that President Truman had chosen. He felt that he had to give the other men time, and we should have taken him more seriously about this because he asked us to check on Truman's date, which was the twenty-ninth of March, 1952. So these three things all converged: the military package was in order and confirmed; the military situation was such that he felt he could take the kind of peace initiative he wanted to, which he'd foreshadowed with the Pope and with the Australians, and he had to get his announcement out to give the other fellows turn-around time to organize their campaigns.

Q: You didn't mention as one of the factors anything which was made so much of in the accounts of the so-called wise men's meetings—I assume you mean to say this is not terribly important.

ROSTOW: I don't believe it was decisive. The President's mind can be tracked from the written record all the way through from the autumn.

Q: From the autumn of 1967?

ROSTOW: Yes, certainly from December; what he said at Canberra, what he said to the Pope, what he said on TV. But he had to wait until he got through this offensive and tamed it, and he picked up and put the pieces together.

Q: And then what were the circumstances that moved those original limited talks onto the total bombing halt in October 1968?

ROSTOW: Well, he got his conditions. You see, he sent Harriman in with only two conditions: one, GVN [Government of Vietnam] participation, and the other was no violation of the DMZ. We added a third when they began to bomb the cities in the May offensive timed by Hanoi to accompany the opening of the Paris talks. You know, they regard all military operations as political and they wanted to scratch the hair on their chests as they opened the talks. This May shelling in Saigon was serious, and so we added a third condition: that the atmosphere for talks would not be conducive to seriousness and so on; in effect, the bombing could be resumed if they shelled indiscriminately, for example, Saigon, Hue, and Danang. But we added that, and finally they began to show some interest, after stone-walling from May until about the tenth of October.

Then we got the package wrapped up and put it to them with the talks to open the next day—a timing point which we'd taken from them. Then they tried another couple or three weeks of testing us. But late in October it was wrapped up. Then the President checked it with Paris to make sure they understood the conditions; he checked it with the Russians in a very secret exchange. They understood what this was all about. He checked it with [Creighton W.] Abrams, eyeball to eyeball, to make sure Abrams recommended that he go.

Q: And then it was announced. So that determined the timing, as far as the American political—

ROSTOW: He had this election period with everybody playing politics with this except him. He felt he just couldn't. If he got his conditions and Abrams recommended it—one

of the most moving moments I know in these years was Abrams' response, of which we have a full text. The President, finally, after going through the whole situation with him—you know, he came in at 2:45 in the morning. This was an hour or later—he finally said, “Now, if you were president, would you do it?” His response was better than I'm about to give you because Abrams talks prose, not military jargon, or bureaucratic jargon. He said something like this, “I cannot judge the responsibilities of the presidency. I would guess you'll be plunged into a cesspool of controversy, but I would do it. It is right.”

Q: Contrary to popular notion of what the military always advises, too.

ROSTOW: This is a matter of record. We have a full transcript of that remarkable session.

Q: You mentioned checking with the Russians. It has been explicitly mentioned that the Russians were very helpful in this.

ROSTOW: I'm not sure they were helpful. All I say is we checked it with them, and they came back and said that they were sure that Hanoi would be serious about this, that they understood the conditions.

Q: Nothing of the nature you mentioned in regard to Laos where they had undertaken to—

ROSTOW: No, nothing as explicit as that. They were careful not to get themselves hooked in the middle of this excessively. But the President did have at least some confirmation. At least, they were put on notice that we would resume bombing.

Q: And this agreement with the GVN was explicit? Is it written, for example?

ROSTOW: Oh, no. They did agree to the GVN participation. They were informed of the conditions. There was no doubt, in other words, the sanction was resumption of bombing.

Q: I see.

ROSTOW: But they understood very well that this could blow the whole thing, and the Russians confirmed that they understood it. They didn't promise, but they understood that the bombing could be resumed, and we intended to. The President made sure, and the cables will show you, privately with Harriman that he would lead the pack in urging a resumption of bombing if the terms were violated.

Q: What about our undertakings in regard to the non-air activity—ground activity? Did we have—?

ROSTOW: None whatsoever. Complete freedom of action.

Q: So anything that's said about what we've done since then would not have an effect.

ROSTOW: It's absolute nonsense. Total nonsense. The conditions involved some de-escalation on their part and keeping away from the cities and indiscriminate attacks if the bombing cessation was to persist. On our side, zero! We undertook not to bombard the North. We made it very clear that we were going to continue reconnaissance.

Q: Over the North.

ROSTOW: They understood that, and they shot at some our planes at first. They've apparently laid off that now, because we began to bomb up there again quietly. That is to say, armed recon went in there and began to shoot up anti-aircraft sites and so on. They shot at them, so they laid off.

Q: What about the understanding that we had simultaneously with the South Vietnamese government, which caused some problems in the early days of the talks? Was that an explicit agreement with them to go into the talks?

ROSTOW: Yes. (Interruption)

I think the one thing I would like to leave—because I do think it was a remarkable accomplishment of President Johnson and it's one that people paid virtually no attention to—is the way he set about in 1966, despite all the burdens on him of Vietnam and the cities and everything else, to build in one part of the world after another—in one area after another—an alternative to isolationism, on the one hand, and over-involvement on the other. In monetary affairs, in trade, in aid, in food aid, and then in Latin American regionalism, African regionalism and Asian regionalism: all designed to move toward situations where others would be organized in ways in which they could take more responsibility, and the United States would take its fair share.

He felt that the country could stay stably in the world on that basis, but that was the direction in which you had to move if you were going to head off a possible isolationist wave, which could be mortally dangerous to us and the world. He sustained this on issue after issue—you'd watch him pick up aid to India, or give instructions for the Kennedy Round, or the line to take at the Punta del Este conference. There was a deep consistency in every move he made, and that's what policy is. It's the application of an approach to individual issues. There was a whole stream of side issues through this period. I think that was a subtle, rare projection of an idea in dozens of concrete situations. If we stay in the world stably and avoid another agonizing reappraisal of our position, a lot of it is going to be due to the forehandedness of President Johnson in pushing for these regional efforts and for the getting of our relationship to the world onto a fair shares-partnership basis.

Q: Is China an exception to that? He's always accused of being excessively rigid in regard to China.

ROSTOW: Oh, no. China was no exception. He always made his speech on China under the heading of reconciliation. He worked in his latter years under four headings: the deterrence of aggression, economic and social progress of the world, regionalism, reconciliation.

Q: Those were the four that you enunciated in your speech in England.

ROSTOW: But that had already been used by President Johnson. You could see those weaving through. I am not sure it isn't even in his piece in the Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook. And that is a natural way to break down President Johnson's policy. Now, he was anxious to move in any way he could with China, and one of our prides was we kept President Johnson very well informed on mainland China issues. We had a resident China watcher in Al Jenkins; who was in excellent contact with all the China experts, and so he followed that. But China, in President Johnson's time, was like a dragon with a bellyache. You know, it was a great country going through internal convulsion and debate as to the struggle for its future at home and abroad, and it just wasn't a viable partner. We offered all kinds of things to start movement, but they just have to get through this themselves.

Q: Things like Humphrey's speech—well-known one in 1966—where he called for some change, were these initiatives that were guided from the White House?

ROSTOW: I don't know about that speech. But the President's view was that he would be delighted if he could find anybody to talk to in China. But, you know, this Chinese drama historians may regard as one of the most important things going on the world scene at this time if it comes out right after the old man [Mao] goes. But it was not something we could do anything about. China's a great country, and there are seven hundred million people. They were caught up in a great debate and struggle as to how they should behave with respect to themselves and the rest of the world. They were not in a mood or in a position to talk to us. So you just had to deter them from using their power aggressively but indicate there was an option open to them when they were ready to talk. I don't think there was anything we could have done that we didn't do. But the President's mood was not rigid. It was just, “They're having one hell of a time, aren't they—not much interested in talking to us and probably won't be for a while until they get this thing settled among themselves.” It was a bloody, tortured affair, and still is.

Q: I don't want to either limit you or badger you, because you've been most generous and cooperative. But if there's anything you think important to say, this is the time to get it down.

ROSTOW: I think the mechanics and the temper of the talks at Glassboro were interesting. President Johnson used every device and resource he could think of to get a time and a place for the missile talks. He understood deeply that getting those talks started was a major event in the history of the human race.

There was something extraordinary about that whole Glassboro business. There were these two men in a dingy study in a teachers-college president's house, wrestling with this. But, of course, Kosygin was on a tight rein. He couldn't decide by himself. There was a real asymmetry in those talks. You had a president who could decide and an agent of a triumvirate, or whatever, who couldn't. Outside you had quite a collection of men. You had Gromyko and Dobrynin and the head of the American section of the Foreign Office and a press man who was sophisticated, and on our side you had Rusk and McNamara and Mac Bundy and myself.

But I should perhaps record, because I don't know where else I'll record it, the contretemps on Sunday when we were all there. You know, we were sitting outside in the dining room, I guess. It was a little parlor off to one side of where the principals were. So we were all there. We were talking about China. Bob McNamara raised it, and he talked about a film that we had all seen on the way back from Guam of the Chinese communist reaction—a film of their nuclear explosion, how they sent troops in in its wake, and how the crowd celebrated in some sort of orgiastic ritual way. He said he was scared; this kind of attitude toward these weapons was frightening. The Russian said in effect, “We're scared, but why should you be so scared? We've got more reason to be scared.” It was one of the most curious little moments I ever saw in diplomacy, of the Russians at that level revealing

their obviously authentic long-term anxiety as to how to live next to China with nuclear weapons.

Q: Which are deliverable there now, not in the 1970s or some future time.

ROSTOW: That's right. And run apparently by nuts. It was quite a moment.

Another thing I would add a word on was the extraordinary grace and self-restraint of President Johnson in the whole transition period. He behaved right through that period from March 31 on as though he had thought deeply about the problem of his withdrawing, and had preconditioned himself to all the problems and strains and frustrations of it. It's not an easy thing to do, to make yourself a lame duck in that sense and to see it through, and to see the opposition party's man elected, and to handle the transition as he did. I would add that his returning home, his adjustment here—one had the feeling that an extremely mature human being had thought about it maturely, and had prepared himself each step of the way. Nothing about that was easy. It was complicated by things; that will emerge probably in twenty years, certain aspects of Nixon's—or Nixon's entourage's—behavior about certain issues. But it was a magnificent performance to observe. And the only way I can describe it is as the highest order of maturity, which is the appreciation of limitation, living with limitation.

But it goes back to a strand in President Johnson that I think is important and hasn't been caught much, which is that he is a man of government—politics. Out of all the presidents of the century, he had the longest and widest experience in government and politics. He had an enormous respect for doing things correctly in government. The image that some have, of a swashbuckling Southwesterner shooting from the hip, is exactly the opposite—an extremely careful man, careful about the correct way to do things. There never was a president who was more scrupulous about avoiding scandal in his administration and having the rules kept. There never was a president who respected the institutions of government and the permanent civil servants, or promoted them more. So his remarkably

stylish performance in this transition was, to an observer and a very minor participant, simply the completion of a career by a man who was always determined to try to do things right in government—not only by the Constitution, but the way a government should be handled.

Q: Went out the same way he had proceeded—

ROSTOW: That's right. But it will be worth historians looking at the transition. It wasn't easy for him. As for those who served him, like myself, again of course it wasn't easy. But he did give us a sense by his own handling of the transition that we were engaged in a high order of public service, and we did do the job in that spirit. Somehow I think that conveyed to the Nixon people: we were looking to them to take over; it's the only government we have, and we were determined to make it as easy as possible.

Q: Again, thank you very much. You've been more than generous with your time.

End of interview